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Charles Simpson

THE HARBORO' COUNTRY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LEICESTERSHIRE AND ITS HUNTS

THE QUORN, THE COTTESMORE, AND THE BELVOIR. Illustrated in colour and black and white by the Author. With an Introduction by Major A. BURNABY, M.F.H.

EL RODEO

One hundred Sketches in colour and black and white made in the Arena during the Great International Contest (1924), with descriptive letterpress by the Artist. With an Introduction by R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM.

THE BODLEY HEAD

TALLY-HO!

An impression of a fox before hounds, as seen at a distance of a few yards.
This fox evidently intended to have his picture in the book. He came straight for the author and a friend, while they were walking across country, paused a moment to give a good "close up," and then jumped through the hedge. The incident happened near Burton Lazars, the northern limit of Tailby's old country. The Cottesmore hounds were in the same field with the fox, having hoicked him from a stick-heap on the far side of the plough. The fox ran on to Garrett Hill, and was eventually lost.

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An impression of a fox before hounds, as seen at a distance of a few yards. This fox evidently intended to have his picture in the book. He came straight for the author and a friend, while they were walking across country, paused a moment to give a good "close up," and then jumped through the hedge. The incident happened near Burton Lazars, the northern limit of Tailby's old country. The Cottesmore hounds were in the same field with the fox, having bolted him from a stick-heap on the far side of the plough. The fox ran on to Garttree Hill, and was eventually lost.

THE HARBORO' COUNTRY

BY CHARLES SIMPSON, R.I.,

WITH 24 ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR AND 52 IN BLACK AND WHITE BY THE AUTHOR, AND AN INTRODUCTION BY LORD STALBRIDGE, JOINT MASTER OF THE FERNIE HUNT

LONDON
JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED

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TO THE MEMORY

OF

WILLIAM WARD TAILBY

AND

CHARLES WITHERINGTON BRUCE FERNIE

Pleasure that the most enchants us
Seems the soonest done;
What is life with all it grants us
But a hunting run!

WHYTE MELVILLE.

HIGH RESOLUTION

HIGH LEICESTERSHIRE

INTRODUCTION

By LORD STALBRIDGE

NEVER have I regretted a moment more bitterly than when I promised Mr. Simpson to write him an introduction to his most interesting and beautifully illustrated book on the Fernie Hunt. Who am I that I should undertake such an onerous task? If only one of my illustrious predecessors in office had been alive to-day, what an introduction he could have written, replete with reminiscences of Hunting in High Leicestershire at its very best; but, alas! they have all joined the great majority, and so I suppose the task must fall on my unworthy shoulders.

The Fernie Country was at one time part of the Quorn, but not many years ago the late Mr. Fernie gave his hounds to the country, on condition that the Quorn relinquished all claim to it. This the Quorn generously agreed to do, and now it is firmly established as an integral hunting country with its own pack of hounds. When I took the country the hounds were kennelled at Medbourne, in some kennels built by the late Sir Bache Cunard when he was Master, but the Committee purchased Mr. Stokes' wonderful stables at Great Bowden, close to Market Harborough and built new kennels there, so that now the Fernie have the best and most complete and up-to-date establishment in the kingdom. Also the kennels are now much more conveniently situated for hunting the country.

And what a country it is! The cream of High Leicestershire! And what more can you want?

I have often wondered why it is that the very name High Leicestershire sends a thrill down the spine, not only of every fox-hunter, but of every sportsman throughout the length and breadth of the land. Is it its past history with its countless names of famous sportsmen, or is it something peculiar to itself? I think it must be the latter—its big fields and its big fences, and above all, and I believe this is the solution of the problem, its wonderful going—miles upon miles of beautiful grass, that, even after a week's rain, hardly shows

the mark of a horse's foot, and yet seems to have all the spring and elasticity of highly tempered steel. There is a sting in it, riding a good horse and jumping the big black fences clean from field to field of perfect turf, that once felt can never be forgotten and, in my humble opinion, can never be felt so completely as in Leicestershire.

There is, of course, also the pace; the fields are large, the going perfect, nothing to stop hounds, and the scent good on the whole, and so hounds travel on at a great pace, and keep going, whereas the horse has always the ridge and furrow to contend with, and, be his shoulders ever so good and his conformation perfect, no horse can gallop at any great speed over ridge and furrow, although it is wonderful how they get across it when they get accustomed to it. But all the same I think it is the ridge and furrow that tires horses so—that, and the big fences, because every fence is a big effort to them; they have got to stand back and go clean over the top and also jump well out into the next field—no creeping or crawling or brushing through. No, the fences in the Fernie country are not to be trifled with; it is clean over the top from field to field, or you will very soon be out of the hunt. What it was in the old days when every fence had a double oxer I don't know. Luckily there are not many of them about now, and perhaps in the old days the number increased as the port went round, because of one thing I am sure, you may on a good horse jump, say, half a dozen when he is fresh, but no horse in the world is going to jump many at the end of forty minutes fast without a check, or twenty minutes either, for the matter of that. Nowadays the place of the oxer is taken by the strand of barbed wire in the summer time, as the farmers must have something to protect their fences from the big bullocks, and of course the Fernie is almost entirely a grazing country; however, the farmers are very good and all the wire is taken down in the winter time, but it is a big business and costs money.

Another great charm about High Leicestershire, at all events from the riders' point of view if not from the huntsman's, is the absence of big woods. Here in the Fernie country we have no woods at all—just small, thick blackthorn coverts, and once you can get a fox away he has got to go somewhere, as the coverts are far apart, and so, given a scent, you are sure of a gallop; but from a huntsman's point of view this is a serious drawback, as there is nothing like big woods to teach hounds to put their heads down and hunt.

Just think of some of our coverts—Walton Holt, Gilmorton, John and Jane Ball, Sheepthorns, Norton Gorse, Shangton Holt, to mention but a few, and what memories they conjure up of good hunts and bad hunts, of hunts well ridden on a good horse, or maybe of hunts when everything has gone wrong

or your horse has put you down at the first fence; never mind, good, bad or indifferent, a hunt is a hunt and those glorious minutes are well worth living for. What would we not give to be able to live them once again?

I have often been asked whether I liked hunting hounds in Leicestershire or whether I would not have preferred some country where it was possible to let your hounds alone more and watch them do the work. It is a difficult question to answer. There are many pros and cons on both sides, but, taking it all in all, I shall give my vote for Leicestershire. There is a thrill in it with a galloping crowd behind you and all grass and big fences in front, and you know you have got to do something—all the hardest and best-mounted riders in the world behind you out for a good gallop and depending on you to give it to them. Of course I hear the critics saying: "Oh, they are only out for the ride, they don't care twopence about the hounds and hunting." True, true, but then with Leicestershire in front of you, who does not want a ride? and given a scent and no one to head the fox they can ride their hardest; hounds will show them the way. No, there is certainly a great exhilaration in it, but I must confess it is the hardest country to hunt a fox in I have ever come across. To start with, the foxes are extraordinarily stout; I suppose it is in a way the result of the survival of the fittest and also because the going is so good there is nothing to tire them. Then again, the coverts are all against the hounds. They are so thick that foxes will not leave them unless properly rattled cubbing and also not until properly found by hounds. This means that your hounds must be good drawers, and to get them to draw well you must never leave them, but must always give them a good chance of getting away. If your fox goes away and you go away after him with the three or four couple you can get first, it means that your good hounds who have been drawing for him in the thick covert get left; they very soon find this out and aren't such fools as to go and draw for him again, with the result that you soon get a pack who won't draw at all, and then you don't find the foxes, let alone have a hunt with them. It is difficult to find the happy medium, with your fox gone away and an eager throng waiting, but it is fatal not to wait for your hounds; they will come quick enough if they are bred right and know you won't wait too long.

Then again one of the great difficulties I find is that foxes can see so far in front of them. They come up a rise and through their meuse in the fence at the top, and then see someone on the next ridge perhaps two miles or more away; they turn back through the fence and run it either left or right. What happens? The hounds come up full cry over the fence and flash on half-way

down the slope, the Field cannot see hounds check and drive them still further on, and by that time you are half a mile beyond where your fox turned. No time then to make a round your hat cast; no, it must be a quick one forward, right or left. If you are lucky and hit it off first time, well and good; if not you are done. Well, it is things like that that make it hard to kill your fox in a galloping country. There are many other reasons, but I fear I have bored you quite enough with the huntsman's difficulties.

There is just one thing I should like you to remember when you compare present-day huntsmen with the heroes of the past, and that is, that nowadays a huntsman's difficulties are vastly greater. For one thing—tarred roads. I have known hounds check four fields down wind of a tarred road, although the fox had gone straight on over the road. Suppose the fox runs a tarred road for, say, half a mile and hounds can't own his line within four fields of it, what is the poor huntsman to do then? The smell of a motor-car will spoil the scent for minutes. Artificial manures and slag are some more kind friends to the fox, to say nothing of the unemployed on bicycles and ladies in limousines. I speak feelingly, I know, but all the same, kind friends, remember this: your huntsman is doing his best to show you sport, so give him every chance you can.

And in conclusion I would say this: the author of this work has so ably and so truthfully portrayed hunting in High Leicestershire that the reader can fairly estimate, if he has not already tasted, the joys of this delectable country. To those who have never experienced the thrill I say: Come now and come quickly; you will never repent it.

STALBRIDGE.

GREAT BOWDEN,
MARKET HARBOROUGH.
7th September, 1926.

NORTON GORSE

PREFACE

THE old Harborough country of the Quorn, now known as the Fernie country, is an area of about twenty miles by fifteen miles in extent. No record of the Harborough country would be complete which did not take into account the exceptionally picturesque and dramatic events that preceded the rise of fox-hunting in Leicestershire. Little more than half a century after the King's hunting horn had sounded in Fawsley Park, in Northamptonshire, two days before the battle of Naseby, Thomas Boothby was hunting the first pack of foxhounds in the Shires.

No excuse is needed for quoting at length from the five volumes of Tailby's "Hunting Journal," the most complete record of fox-hunting ever compiled, covering a period of fifty-four years. Some extracts from the journal have already been printed, but there is no complete analysis of the five closely written volumes, which are as instructive for the fox-hunter to-day as they are graphic and entertaining. Tailby's spelling of place-names is not always correct, but, except in cases where there is an obvious slip, the original spelling has been retained. The abbreviations 1st and 2nd whip, as written in the journal, are also used in the text for the sake of clearness.

Among the many whom I wish to thank for their help while writing and illustrating the present volume are Lord Stalbridge, M.F.H., for his kindness in writing the Introduction, and, among other favours, for giving me facilities for making the sketches in the Fernie kennels; and Major Wernher, M.F.H., for his courtesy and kindness. I wish particularly to thank Captain George Tailby and Mrs. Tailby, the former especially for placing at my disposal Mr. Tailby's "Hunting Journal," from which he has given me permission to make the extracts quoted in the book. My acknowledgments are also due to Captain H. S. Macpherson for his invaluable help while collecting information and exploring the country, and for lending me his own records of sport with the Fernie in recent years. We had many interesting days together which will always be a pleasant recollection. To him also, and to Mr. F. W. Harris, M.A.,

Mr. S. H. Skillington, and Mr. F. Sérille Phillips, B.Litt., D.-ès-L., F.R.S.L., F.R.S.A., I am indebted for reading the proofs. Mr. Skillington, the historian of Leicester, has given special attention to the historical portions of the book, and his expert criticism has been of the greatest service. I wish also to thank my father, Major-General Simpson, C.B., Major-General O'Dowda, C.B., C.S.I., C.M.G., and Mrs. O'Dowda, and Mr. C. E. Vulliamy, F.R.G.S., who in their different spheres have given expert assistance.

For their help and kindness on various occasions my grateful thanks are due to the following: Sir Arthur G. Hazlerigg, Bart., and Lady Hazlerigg; Lord Cottisloe; Major W. F. E. Massey, the Secretary of the Fernie Hunt; Major T. Guy Paget, in particular for the loan of many books; Colonel W. A. S. Gemmell, D.S.O.; Mr. C. E. Barwell Ewins; Mr. Charles Isaac; Mr. W. Whitaker; Mr. Arthur Thatcher; Mr. J. T. Forsell; Mr. W. H. Herbert; Captain T. C. Hobbs; the Rev. T. K. Bonney Nevinson, M.A., especially for permission to print his account of the fires at Medbourne; the Rev. T. H. Ross, Mus.D., for the loan of books and records concerning Church Langton; Miss Turner (of Stockerston Hall); Mr. T. Cross; Captain F. A. Bellville; Captain E. S. Beadon; Major Parkyn, O.B.E., the librarian of the Royal United Service Institution Library; Captain H. E. Foster; Mr. E. Ernest Ellis, especially for the loan of books; Mr. John Bland and Mr. C. R. Knighton.

My special thanks are also due to the kennel-huntsman, whippers-in, and kennel-man of the Fernie Hunt, Messrs. C. Adcock, J. Lucas, R. Mould and W. Hibberd, for their help in giving facilities to make some of the illustrations, and for information on many points, for which I am sincerely grateful.

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its Present," by Colonel Maude; "Diary of the Marches of the Royal Army," April–August, 1645, by Richard Symonds (Harl. MSS., 911, Brit. Mus.).

Note.—The diary is written in a pocket-book which was carried by Symonds during the Battle of Naseby. The writing is very small, but clear. Entries referring to the battle are brief. After a few hasty jottings describing the beginning of the engagement, several pages are left almost blank, until the retreat to Leicester is recorded in a short entry, which ends "We had now left running." Earlier parts of the diary contain notes on heraldry, with drawings of coats of arms.

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Note.—The following pictures have been reproduced by kind permission of their owners: *The Hardwicks*, Mr. A. Potter; *The Valley of the Stonton Brook*, Mr. G. R. Wheeler; *The Ford Spinney*, Major-General Simpson, C.B.; *Some of the Fernie Bitch Pack*, Mrs. Tyrwhitt Drake; and *A Rainstorm over Rolleston*, Mr. A. H. Phillips.

PART I

MARKET HARBOROUGH

CHAPTER I

TO NASEBY FIELD

"As the two armies stood in battle array a hunting party with the hounds in full cry swept across the plain between Roundhead and Cavalier."—THOROLD ROGERS.

WHETHER the curious story told by Thorold Rogers is true or not (the incident is not mentioned by eye-witnesses of the battle), a hunting party might easily have passed between the two armies before ten in the morning, when the battle commenced. The King himself was hunting on June 12th, two days before the battle. In the MS. diary of Symonds, a quartermaster in the Royalist army, there is an entry dated Thursday, June 12th:

"The Kinge was hunting a buck within two miles of Daintree. There came a strong alarum so that the whole army was drawn on the Beacon Hill and lay there that night."

The Royalist forces were encamped round Daventry, where they had marched from Harborough on June 7th, having entered Harborough two days before, after the siege and occupation of Leicester. They remained at Daventry waiting for the return of a convoy, "the cause of this unhappy stay here so long," * which had carried supplies to Oxford. The convoy returned on the night of June 12th, a few days after the blockade of Oxford had been raised, Fairfax having withdrawn his army towards Northampton. Early on Friday morning, camp was struck and the march commenced back towards Harborough.

Joshua Sprigge, chaplain to Fairfax at the time of the battle, commences what he describes as "A true and exact relation off the worke off this daye" with the first contact of the two armies before the Royalists left their camp on Burrough Hill outside Daventry:

"A commanded party off horse gave the enemie an alarum, and took some prisoners, by whom they understood the Kinge was a hunting, the souldiers in no good order, and theire horses all at grass, having not the least knowledge of

* Symonds, MS. diary.

our advance, and being in the greatest security that could be; but the alarum was so quicklie taken thorow all theire quarters, that our foot being somewhat behinde and night approaching it was not thought wisdome to make any further attempt. As the General was riding in the morninge about three off the clock, within a mile and a half of Flowre, where the enemie kept a horse guard, he could discern the enemie riding fast over Burrough-hill, to make fires in abundance, as if they were firing theire huts; which gave some cause to believe they were about to march, as indeed it proved afterwards. For about

THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL, 1645.

five in the morninge, June 13th, the General returned to the headquarters; the Scout-master, General Watson (whose continued diligence in getting timely intelligence off the enemies motions, then and alwayes, redounded not a little to the enoblement of the armie) brought him certain notice that the enemie was drawing off from Burrough-hill; and stood in arms all night, and were all amazed that our armie was so neare, it being said abroad in theire armie we were gone for securitie into the association; and foure or five more of theire spies came one after another, confirming the same intelligence, adding further, that most of theire carriages were drawn from Burrough-hill towards Harborough."

Meanwhile, the King, who had marched into Daventry, according to some

accounts, " with a thorough resolution of fighting," having received intelligence at Harborough on June 7th of a reverse to Fairfax before Oxford,* had been turned from his purpose by the apparition of Strafford : " About two hours after the Kinge retired to rest (on the preceding night at Daventry) some off his attendants hearing an uncommon noise in his chamber, went into it, where, it is said, they found his Majestie sitting up in bed, and much agitated, but nothing which could have produced the noise they heard. The Kinge in a trembling voice inquired after the cause of their alarm and told them how much he had been agitated in a dream, by thinking he saw the apparition off Lord Strafford, who after upbraiding him with unkindnesse told him he was come to return good for evill, and that he advysed him by no means to fight the parliament armie that was att that time quartered att Northampton, for it was one whom the Kinge could never conquer by arms." †

There is a letter written by Charles I to Secretary Nicholas which is clear evidence of his change of purpose after this night :

" NICHOLAS

This is first to send this inclosed by your *means* to the *Queen*, then to let you know you are like to hear from me tomorrow. I march to Laudabay, after that to Melton, and so on to Belvoir, but I assure you that I shall looke before I leap further north, but I am going to *supper*, so I rest

Your asseured friend,

CHARLES R."

Throughout the early hours of June 13th, the Royalist army moved away from the Burrough heights towards Naseby and Harborough. The army was encumbered not only by its artillery, which included two demi-cannon and two demi-culverins (the former each drawn by some twenty-five horses in single file, the latter by seven horses, all commandeered from the surrounding farms) besides the lighter guns and a long train of waggons, but by many coaches, some carrying officers' wives and " ladyes of qualitie," and others laden with " stores of wealth," including the spoils of Leicester. By nightfall on the 13th, the van of the army had reached and even passed through Harborough, round which town the main body was concentrated ; while the rear was at Naseby, the troops being in cantonments in both places and in the villages between them. The King intended to sleep that night at Lubenham, having gone to the Old Hall outside the village, where he had spent two nights before the march to Daventry.

* Symonds, MS. diary. † Rastell.

The house, on the site of which only a small dilapidated building remains, was then occupied by Mr. Collins; it was surrounded by a moat and capable of being strongly defended, no doubt a reason for the King's choice. The King seems to have had little information concerning the movements of the Parliament's troops, and, like his army, to have prepared for rest with a feeling of perfect security. A second warning from Strafford (on this occasion said to have been menacing) had strengthened his determination not to fight, in spite of the persuasion of Prince Rupert: yet he and his generals seem to have held the Roundheads in something like contempt, and it was as much the affront to the King's dignity* as the alarm it caused which made Ireton's attack an excuse for casting away all ideas of prudence.

On Friday evening some troopers of Prince Rupert's life guards and Langdale's horse, quartered at Naseby, were at supper in Shuckburgh House, seated at a long table, which is still preserved in Naseby Church; others were playing quoits at the village inn. Here was struck the blow that precipitated the battle.

At Kislingbury, Fairfax had been joined by Cromwell (with six hundred horse), who was welcomed by the soldiers "with a great shout: 'Ironsides,' they cried, 'is come to head us'." Orders were given for "drums to beat, trumpets to sound to horse, and all our armie to draw to a rendeyvous." A flank attack was decided upon after a long debate. Fairfax's main body reached Guilsborough on Friday night, the 13th; a force under command of Major Harrison went south towards Daventry; and Colonel Ireton "with a strong partie of horse" pressed on in the direction of Naseby, with orders to "fall upon the flank off the enemie iff he saw cause."

Joshua Sprigge thus describes the surprise attack:

"No sooner was the General got to his quarters, but tidings were brought him off the good service done by Colonel Ireton, in falling into the enemies quarters, which they had newlie taken up in Naseby town: where he took manie prisoners, some off the Prince's life guards and Langdale's brigades, and gave a sound alarum thorow the enemies armie, (the confidence of the enemie in possessing these quarters, grounded upon theire slight esteem of this armie, and want of intelligence, was remarkable). Upon this alarum, the King, (not having notice off it till eleven att night, as he had little imagined the nearnesse off our armie, or that they durst bear up to him) much amazed, left his own quarters at that unreasonable time; and for security went to Harborough, where Prince Rupert was quartered; and as soon as he came thither, sent to call up his nephew

* Carlyle, Appendix VIII, Vol. V.

(resting himself in a chair in a low room * in the meantime) who presently arose ; a council off war was called ; the question was put, what was best to be done seeing our armie was so neare, and as they then perceived, fully intended to ingage them. It was considered by them that should they march on to Leicester iff the rearguard were ingaged, the whole armie might be put in hazard and there was no marching with the van unless they could bring the rear clear off,

DAWN : NASEBY FIELD.

which they discerned to be difficult. Whereupon it was resolved to give battel."

A westerly wind was blowing across the broad square of Harborough, having risen as evening drew on, and this wind was already the subject of discussion as the King and Prince Rupert, Sir Marmaduke Langdale and the Earl of Lichfield, with other leaders, made their plans for the approaching day. They knew that the Roundheads also would manœuvre for position to windward, so that the movements of their cavalry would not be hindered by their own dust.†

* Supposed to have been in the old King's Head Inn at Harborough.

† Colonel Maude, "Cavalry; its Past, its Future."

The King's Head Inn stood at the corner of King Street: outside the old building the coach was drawn up in which the King had driven * from Lubenham, and in the darkness the clanking of arms and the sound of galloping horses told of orders sent hastily to the troops in outlying cantonments. The high ground between Farndon and Oxendon had been decided on as the rendezvous for the whole army, which began to leave its quarters at two in the morning.† All down the High Street were piled arms and accoutrements; long lines of horses faced the walls of the houses and were ranged round the arches below the grammar school, where many of the soldiers were resting. Above the square loomed the tall tower of the church. Apart from the troopers riding hurriedly through the ranks of horses and waggons there was no movement of troops in the square. Flowing south of the town on its course from Sibbertoft, the River Welland passed under a stone and timber bridge, known as the Great Bridge, on the Northampton road, beside which was a ford used by waggons and coaches at low water; on the Farndon road there was only a ford. The routes to be taken and the order of march when recrossing the Welland were other subjects for discussion at the council of war, most of the artillery and a great number of the waggons having already entered the town, and being then drawn up in the square. Some of the waggons, indeed, had passed through Harborough and were on the Leicester road, a fact which was later reported to Fairfax and caused him to doubt, shortly before the armies came into contact, whether the Royalists meant to attack. The horsing of the guns, which depended for transit entirely on horses collected from the countryside, many of which were exhausted after dragging the guns from the neighbourhood of Daventry, was an urgent problem if an early move was to be made back towards Naseby.

In houses round the square and along the High Street, many windows were lighted; the larger inns were occupied by officers, by their wives, and by the ladies of the Court who accompanied the King; all were in a mood for a gay evening, weary of the tedious delay at Daventry, and talking of the journey northward on the morrow; all, too, spoke lightly of a chance engagement with the troops of the Parliament, the impression still being strong that, in spite of sundry alarms, there would be no general battle or, if there was, that an easy victory would be theirs. Not for an hour or two was the King's sudden decision known, not until the trumpets sounded a call to arms. Then the square woke to confused movement and the rumble of waggons; before

* Captain A. P. Charrier, "Cromwell."

† Symonds, MS. diary.

even the first grey light revealed the tower of the church and, beneath its shadow, the dull flicker of steel and the closely packed troopers and horses. Before three in the morning the recrossing of the Welland began.

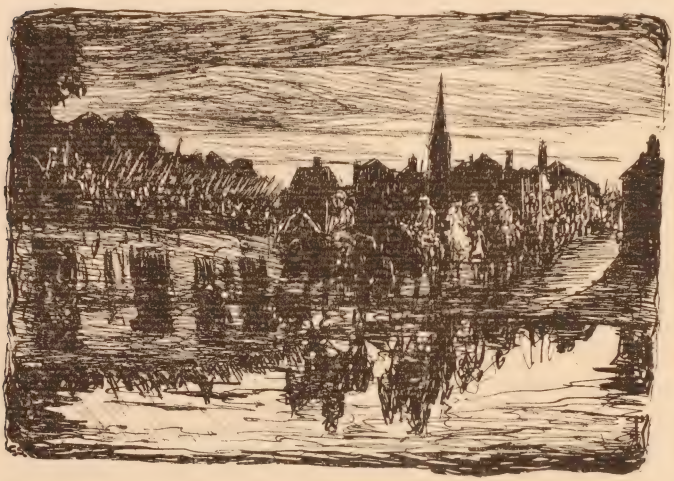
A pale light shone on the water at the Farndon Ford, broken in flashes of cold silver as Rupert's first squadrons clattered down the paved descent and splashed across the stream. In the dim light the iron head-pieces of the dragoons and their pikes gleamed above the dark backs of their horses. Their cuirasses caught a faint glint from the morning sky. At the head of each troop fluttered a " small cornet or flag," * like a pale ghost moving on before them. The troopers in several of the squadrons were armed with short muskets, slung over the shoulder, each man holding in his bridle hand a smouldering match. All passed swiftly across the ford and trotted away over the open fields.

Meanwhile, in the square, the continuous rumble of guns and waggons being drawn to their places aroused every soul in Harborough. The people watched sullenly, for Harborough was a town of Roundhead sympathies; many, in fact, had gone, leaving at the first approach of the Royalist troops, with bitter memories of Prince Rupert and his cavaliers. Columns of foot passed out of the square, down the Northampton road, and across the Great Bridge, their long match-locks swaying as they marched. A continuous array of pikes, gleaming just below the first-floor windows of the houses, chilled the hearts of those who leant out to watch the soldiers; the rhythmic tramping of hundreds of feet drowned even the reverberations of the wheels of the cannon and culverins and the shouts of the commandeered farmhands, as they urged on their horses to drag the guns. The grotesque shapes of the brass cannon, surmounted by their ramrods projecting beyond the muzzle, their heavy trunnions securely clamped in their carriages, passed the shadow of the church, the horses straining at their traces and lifting the trails of the guns, which slowly lumbered across the square.

A way having been cleared among the troops, the King himself, with a group of officers, rode to the corner of the Northampton road to watch the soldiers passing, his face darkly shaded beneath his wide-brimmed hat in the strange half-light, his armour and trappings and the standard held by a trooper beside him patterned like a mosaic against the dawn-grey of the houses. Slowly the sky lightened. A faint flush glowing in the east and away towards Naseby illumined pale wisps of cloud that floated overhead.

* Warburton, " Memoirs of Prince Rupert and the Cavaliers."

As it grew light the rough tracks converging on Oxendon and Farndon Field glittered with the pikes and halberts of the Welsh foot, forming in battalions, knee-deep in the sodden grass, rising like spectres out of the fog that hung over the Welland ; the soldiers were weary after their long march on the preceding day, and their faces had a paleness accentuated by the cold light and the mist which rose about them, the shine of the dew on the fields mingling with the dull



THE WELLAND.

shine of their arms. The ensigns of each battalion held their colours ; the flags hanging motionless, concealing their golden scrolls and rich design between their folds, or, as the troops breasted the higher ground, flaunting heavily in the west wind. On the flanks of the foot regiments, gradually marshalled into the tertias of their order of battle, great bodies of horse came slowly into view over the crest of the ridge, moving forward in the still uncertain light towards Sibbertoft. Like hundreds of dull red sparks, scattered over the fields, the matches of the dragoons glowed strangely through the grey morning.

Uncertain of the movements of the Parliament's troops, they rode forward ready instantly to engage them. As squadron after squadron went by at the trot, the whole hillside was darkened with their masses, and the rising sun at last struck full upon them, in distant view of the Parliament's line of battle.

Between five and six in the morning, all doubts of the Roundheads were set aside, and report came to Fairfax of the sight, in rapid advance, of the Royalist horse.

And still at Harborough the square was a scene of hurried movement and departure. Heavy coaches approached the river crossings, long waggons laden with camp equipment and two-wheeled carts with powder barrels lashed together on their low platforms—all withdrew from the town to the place of rendezvous. Last of all, escorted by squadrons of an improvised rearguard, and battalions of Lichfield's foot, were the coaches carrying the wives of officers, the King's Cabinet, and the equipment of the Royal train.

As they splashed through the ford in the wake of the troops, many inhabitants of the town followed, curious crowds drawn together by an overwhelming desire to watch the battle. Far away, on the tower of Naseby Church, other sightseers watched the two armies converge. The whole countryside was stirred by rumours of the approaching fight; and, before the armies actually engaged, herds of cattle were driven from their pasture in the valley between them.

Then it may have been that a hunting party swept by along the Broad Moor Vale, the cry of hounds and the sound of the horn lost in the first detonations of the Roundhead guns at Naseby.

And so we must leave Market Harborough on the morning of June 14th, 1645. The River Welland saw many things that day; its waters ran dark at the Farndon crossing, called for many generations afterwards "Bloody Man's Ford." And away over Farndon Field, "within the gate-place in the road between Naseby and Farndon," the sounds of the Royalist army in flight and the grinding together of wheels and crash of overturned coaches mingled with the hoof-beats of the Parliament's horse; and there arose a cry above the shouts of the troopers, "Remember Cornwall, you ———," a cry poignant as the whistling of swords, that told of the fate of "the ladyes of qualitie" who followed the King.

CHAPTER II

A HUNDRED YEARS AFTER

"The Quorn country has had its fair share of changes. . . . One hardly knows over what extent of country Mr. Boothby roamed, but his limits were probably wider than those of Mr. Meynell, who hunted from Clifton Gardens, near Nottingham, to Market Harborough." —W. C. A. Blew.

FOX-HUNTING began in Leicestershire just half a century after the Battle of Naseby, that is, fox-hunting concerning which there is any record at all of a Master and pack. Mr. Thomas Boothby, of Tooley Park, Leicestershire, which is now in the Atherstone country, was born in 1677. He hunted (there is no record of his having employed a huntsman) his own pack for fifty-five years; and, assuming that he hunted hounds until the year of his death, 1752, was a Master of Foxhounds in 1697; but he may have been Master a few years earlier. He is often spoken of as the first Master of the Quorn, but as the Quorn Hounds only received their title after Hugo Meynell bought Quorndon Hall, about 1754, he may more correctly be designated the first Master who hunted what was later known as the Quorn country.

Fifty years seems a very short space to divide a period when mediæval armour was still used in warfare (it had only been partially discarded in 1645), when stage waggons and coaches were regarded as a novelty, having been started about 1640, the coach itself being but little removed from a waggon, with unglazed windows and leather straps as the first notion of springs, when there were no newspapers, nor any means of communication except by messenger, from a period which marks the commencement of modern fox-hunting. The country was still for the great part unenclosed. The famous hedge which divided the lordships of Sulby and Naseby, and formed cover for Okey's dragoons during the battle, was still one of the few boundary hedges traversing an open rolling common; another hedge marked the eastern side of Naseby Field, according to Robert Streater's plan published two years after the battle; and so it was everywhere, only important boundaries being marked. The intervening land

was in many places gorse-grown and wild, much of it infested with rabbits and riddled with the " coney warrens " which so embarrassed the cavalry at Naseby.

Foxes were truly wild, and treated as vermin much like rabbits when Boothby began hunting, and they were in consequence scarce in places and widely scattered. A large territory was necessary for any Hunt, when a meet once a fortnight in a wide area could alone ensure promise of sport : a meet three days a week in any of the famous countries as they are now divided would have resulted in most of the days being blank. The fox, in fact, would not have escaped the risk of being exterminated, like the wolf—a fate which would assuredly have been his, had not the energy and enthusiasm of men such as Boothby and Meynell founded the sport of fox-hunting in Leicestershire.

IN THE OLD DAYS.

To Thomas Boothby belongs the distinction of having designed the modern hunting horn. A letter is printed in Mrs. Chaworth Muster's " Hunting Songs and Sport " which states that " Mr. Boothby is credited with having altered the pattern of the hunting horn, instituting a straight instrument for that seen in old pictures, and slung round the body." * In *The Field* for November 6th, 1875, there is an engraving of Squire Boothby's hunting horn. The horn bears the inscription, " Thomas Boothby, Esquire, of Tooley Park, Leicestershire. With this horn he hunted the first pack of foxhounds then in England fifty-five years. Born 1677 ; died 1752." As Mr. Blew points out, there were earlier packs in other parts of the country, notably the Charlton (afterwards the Goodwood), but the horn is valuable evidence of the date when the first Leicestershire pack was formed.

* Blew, " The Quorn Hunt and its Masters."

Unfortunately there are no records of the sport obtained in Boothby's day, nor of the actual boundaries of the country he hunted. Authentic records as far as the Quorn country is concerned begin with Hugo Meynell.

When Meynell took over the country in 1753, at twenty years of age,* he resided at Langton Hall. But the neighbourhood of Market Harborough was not then considered an ideal hunting country; its main attraction in later days from a riding point of view—the sporting fences—was practically non-existent, beyond the boundary hedges, and most of the famous coverts are of much later date. Its chief advantage was the proximity of the big Cottesmore woods, first hunted by Meynell, but made neutral coverts by agreement with Lord Gainsborough a few years later. These woods were invaluable for schooling young hounds, and in Beaumont Chase there were unique facilities for breaking them from deer.

Charnwood Forest, however, had been famous for sport for hundreds of years and, long after fox-hunting became the fashion, was looked upon as the best centre for hunting in Leicestershire. The forest was not enclosed until 1808, the year of Meynell's death, and though a great part of it was open heath, we have it on the authority of Leland that there were also extensive woods before the enclosure. Meynell, when he came to Leicestershire, did not own an acre of land. He resided at Langton Hall with a grandson of Thomas Boothby, known as "Prince" Boothby, whose sister he married in 1757, after the death of his first wife. "Prince" Boothby, although he contributed to the upkeep of the hounds (he was one of only two subscribers to the Hunt in 1753), does not seem to have been wholly devoted to the sport. He was a man of rather eccentric habits and grandiose ideas, and perhaps not altogether a congenial companion for Hugo Meynell. Boothby got his nickname from his love of the "society of the great," and when in their company he neglected and even ignored his friends. In any case, the new Master at once considered the purchase of an estate in the most suitable district for kennelling his hounds, and it was to Charnwood Forest that he turned. The purchase of Quorndon Hall, with its surrounding woodlands, from Laurence Earl Ferrers, gave him what he wanted. The hounds were moved from their kennels at Great Bowden Inn, which were, however, retained for hunting the Harborough district, and the Hunt was thereafter known as the Quorn Hunt.

It is interesting to reflect on what might have been the history of the country and the pack had Meynell decided to remain in the neighbourhood of

* The date of his birth is uncertain; if, as has been stated, he was born in 1735, he was only eighteen.

HEAVY GOING

Harborough. Langton Hall would have had the place in hunting history which Quorndon Hall has to-day, and Market Harborough might have gained at that time the popularity which a little later was to come to Melton. Melton Mowbray in Meynell's first years was not a hunting centre. Leicester and Loughborough, where the Quorndon Club was established, were the popular—and very gay—centres for hunting in Quorn country, until Mr. Lambton, "who was a quiet and somewhat shy man, finding his companions rather too high spirited for him, cast about for a quieter location, and eventually selected 'the unfrequented town of Melton.'" * Of Harborough itself we hear little at this time in connection with hunting; its reign was shortly to come with the fame of the Pytchley Hunt, and later the Billesdon Hunt; but in these early days Meynell is supposed to have hunted part of the present Pytchley country.

Some idea may be gained of the character of hunting in Boothby's day from the custom, which became part of Meynell's regular system, of entering young hounds to hare (probably because before Meynell's time the hare and fox were indiscriminately hunted), the reason apparently being that "when cub-hunting commences, those hounds are generally found to enter more readily which have indulged in a little self-hunting after hares when at their walks." † That this custom in no way interfered with the discipline of Meynell's hounds is proved by the fact that the pack was trained to wait in the same field while a few selected couples "were running hard in an adjoining gorse, nor did they attempt to break from the whipper-in until cheered to the cry by Jack Raven." ‡ The waiting pack consisted of "such a numerous phalanx as one hundred couples of hounds!" § Unwieldy as such a pack must have been, it is certain that for some years Meynell, with the assistance of huntsmen whose names are unrecorded, and later (from 1775) with the services of Jack Raven, did manage some two hundred hounds in the field, though for the last twenty-five years of his mastership the pack was restricted to twenty couples, sometimes less. It is a pleasing picture to imagine this orderly regiment of hounds waiting patiently at the covertside, while a few couples are giving tongue to their fox, and the avalanche which must have followed the laying on of the pack. The hounds must have far out-numbered the field, for at first there were few subscribers to the Hunt, and it is doubtful whether, when once the pack got going, there was any over-riding at that time; if there had been, casualties among the hounds must have been numerous. But to see them

* Blew, *op. cit.*

† Cecil, "Records of the Chase."

‡ Colonel Cook, "Observations on Hunting."

§ Cecil, *op. cit.*

in full cry over the open country, followed by Meynell, Lord Cavendish, Boothby, and the few early subscribers, the music of the pack sounding like the moaning of the sea—two hundred throats in chorus—must have been as awe-inspiring as it was strange to the people of the countryside.

Before the end of the eighteenth century the sport enjoyed with the Quorn Hounds had become famous ; but not until 1791, long after Meynell had given up the use of so large a pack, is there any actual record of runs. A diary was kept by Joseph Jones (one of Meynell's whippers-in, better known as Cork-legged Jones) from 1791 to 1800, published in 1816, to which writers on hunting have mainly referred for records of the latter period of Meynell's mastership. Many of the runs recorded in this diary are undated, but, as Mr. Blew remarks, they bear out the statement that towards the end of the eighteenth century the Quorn Hounds had more good runs than any pack in England. Two runs are recorded by Mr. Hawkes in " The Meynellian Science of Fox Hunting by System," a very rare treatise privately printed shortly after Meynell's death ; one of these runs lasted for two hours and fifty minutes, the other for one hour and fifty minutes without a check, both ending with a kill.

There is evidence to show that Meynell generally hunted from Langton Hall for part of every season, the hounds being kennelled at Bowden Inn ; this, however, would prove nothing but that outlying kennels were used for all fixtures at any great distance from Quorndon, except that the hounds were always at Bowden Inn for the early part of the season ; it would seem, therefore, that they were there for the cub-hunting, and this bears out the special clause in the Gainsborough agreement with regard to schooling young hounds.

In 1759, when the great performance of " The Messiah " was given at Church Langton, referred to in a later chapter, the dishes of the " cold collation " are described by Mr. Hanbury as " dressed by Mr. Meynell's cook," so it is evident that his household was transferred to Langton Hall. The performance of " The Messiah " was given in September, when cub-hunting had started in the woods of Noseley and Rolleston, and the more distant strongholds of the Cottesmore highlands.

Here this brief sketch must end, when just over a century had rolled by after the Naseby Fight.

CHAPTER III

HARBOROUGH TOWN

"Market Harborough is not only a pleasant town, it is a convenient one as well. It has good shops and excellent postal arrangements, not to speak of a first-rate railway service to town."—T. F. DALE.

A CONTRAST to Dale's paragraph describing Market Harborough as a hunting centre at the beginning of the twentieth century is Throsby's description written in the middle of the eighteenth :

"A considerable Market town in Leicestershire, stands near the River Welland on the London Road, about fifteen miles from Leicester. It is in the parish of Great Bowden. Its market is on Tuesday ; and it has a very considerable fair on October 9th for live stock, particularly young colts. Hither many of the London dealers resort.

"This place consists of one open street, well-built, in which are several good inns. The school was endowed in 1614 by Mr. Robert Smith. Here is a Quaker, a Methodist, and a Presbyterian meeting-house. The Earl of Harborough who takes his title from this place, has lately built a good town-house * and shambles under it. It has a decent front, on the outside of which are displayed his Lordship's arms, in a very heavy style."

The fame of Market Harborough as an agricultural town dates back well over seven hundred years. The Tuesday market was originally held on Mondays, but, as Mr. Bland points out in his interesting book, "Bygone Days in Market Harborough," the Monday market was interfered with by a market held on the same day at Rothwell, and a complaint was made to Henry III : "In the Close Rolls of 1219 it is stated that 'the Market at Rowell was held to the hurt of the Market at Harborough, which is held and was wont to be held on Monday' and the market at Rothwell was consequently ordered to be held on another day. This order was not carried out and in 1221 the King allowed the Harborough Market to be held on Tuesday instead of Monday, and so it has continued since that time."

* The Town Hall.

The Manors of Harborough were held by the Crown until the reign of Henry II, and afterwards by the Mauduit family and the Cantilupe family, reverting to the Crown again some time before the year 1334, when they passed

THE TUESDAY MARKET.

to the Scropes. After many changes, they were finally held by the Earl of Harborough about 1785. In addition to the Fair and Market Tolls, from time immemorial the Lords of the Manor took toll for every flock of sheep " of seven or more 4*d.*; and, if under seven, a halfpenny a piece," and for the passage of all cows, oxen, bulls, and hogs that passed through the town. A loaded waggon

or wain paid a toll of 2*d*., and a loaded cart, 1*d*. These " Thorough Tolls " were regarded as an injury to the town, which was often avoided by road traffic on account of them. The matter was brought before a court of law and in 1844 the " Thorough Tolls " were abolished, the last Earl of Harborough, who defended his rights, having lost his case. The title itself became extinct with his death in 1859.

The name of Harborough is supposed to have an agricultural derivation. John Hill writes in his history of the town :

" In the *Testa de Nevill*, this place is called both Herberbur, Buggedon,* and Haverburgh, it is called by the latter name in most ancient writings where it is mentioned, and *Haver*, Johnson informs us, is a common word in the northern Counties for oats. This may have given occasion to the tradition that it owes its rise to the good oats which travellers used to find at an inn here, the King's Head, supposed to be at that time the only house in the place. To this tradition Moreton has given some authority, by observing that Market Harborough, and some other road towns, that are now considerable, took their rise from a single inn. Another account is, that this town was built by an Earl of Chester, who resided in Leicester Castle, for the convenience of a lodging place for himself and his retinue in his passage to and from London. But there is reason to believe that neither of these traditions has any foundation in truth, for it is certain that Harborough can produce a very strong claim to Roman antiquity. On the east side of it are very plain traces of an encampment, which, from its form, there is good ground to think of Roman origin. At a short distance, both east and west of it, Roman urns and other fragments of their pottery have been discovered. The remains of the old encampment, most conspicuous, present themselves in the first close on the east side of the town, through which the foot road lies to Great Bowden. It has long been known by the name of the King's Head Close, being an old enclosure. The house formerly the King's Head Inn, now converted into private houses, stood directly opposite the south-east corner of the Town Hall. It is said to have been the ancient manor house, and from its vicinity to this camp, it is very probable it was so, for wherever these camps are discovered, the manor house is generally built in or near them. The ditch is done away with all around it, but so much of the rampart is left as to show clearly its form. The rampart appears very little elevated, because the field has been ploughed, but it is plainly a work of art. It extends along a short part of the south side of the camp, and

* Bowden.

along the whole of the east and north sides. The camp appears to have contained, according to the remains of it, about six acres of land. The four sides of the camp were nearly opposed to the four cardinal points of the compass; and the whole was effectually sheltered from the north by the rising grounds between this town and Great Bowden."

Hill wrote in 1875, and in White's "Leicestershire and Rutland," published twelve years earlier, there is the following reference to the encampment:

"The most conspicuous traces of the entrenchments are in the King's Head Close, so called from its being attached to the ancient King's Head Inn, now a private dwelling. The banks and fosse, now nearly levelled with the adjacent lands, encompassed a square area of about six acres, near which were discovered, in 1779, two sepulchral urns, formed of clay slightly baked, and one of them very large. Two other small urns were afterwards found; and at subsequent periods various fragments of other urns, burnt bones, pieces of patera, etc., have been discovered. Even in the principal street, an ancient drain, which appeared to be of Roman Masonry, was found a few feet below the surface, about the close of the last century."

For centuries an open drain (crossed by foot-bridges) ran through the High Street and across the square, by means of which all the drainage of the town was carried into the Welland, and this was in existence up to the seventeenth century. The date of its removal is uncertain, but may very likely have been at the time referred to by White, when the supposed Roman drain was discovered towards the end of the eighteenth century.

The fate of the King's Head Inn, with a number of other old inns, was probably decided when road traffic declined owing to the introduction of canals, and, later, railways. The last record of it as an inn is about 1780. It was mentioned in the Enclosure Award of June 20th, 1777, with several other inns which no longer exist. The Union Canal was opened for traffic in 1809. There were a great many inns at Harborough, which, apart from its agricultural importance, owed much of its prosperity to the constant traffic through the town on the main road from Leicester to London. Long before the great coaching days there was a more primitive form of stage waggon and coach, the latter being introduced, as previously mentioned, about 1640. In 1677 the Company of Coach and Coach-Harness Makers was founded by Charles II, and with the improvement of roads there was a great increase in the form of travelling. The development of coaches was looked upon with great disfavour by the barge watermen who plied a constant trade on the larger rivers, especially the Thames, and it is recorded as early as 1605 that "coaches have increased

with a mischief, and have ruined the trade of watermen by hackney coaches, and now multiply more than ever."

Market Harborough has been a centre of various industries at different times, the most important being in connection with the woollen industry. Tammies, a form of light worsted and woollen stuffs, were manufactured there for over a hundred years, the Town Hall being erected by the Earl of Harborough in 1788 for the accommodation of those employed in the trade, which gradually declined until it had practically ceased by the middle of the nineteenth century.

A peculiarity of the town is that it has no lands belonging to it, being surrounded, except at the south side, by the lands of Great Bowden. This has led to many sayings, such as, " A goose will eat all the grass in Harborough Field." It has also been an old cause of complaint that there was no right of common at Harborough. The surrounding land, like that of all manors in the Middle Ages, was chiefly arable; Richard Phillips mentions how forty teams of horses in one lordship were reduced to two teams, as the land was gradually turned into grass.

The parochial position of Market Harborough is complicated. It is really extra-parochial, and not, as is sometimes stated, in the parish of Great Bowden. The church, which has no graveyard, was formerly a chapel of St. Mary-in-Arden, itself once a chapel, as recorded in 1220, in connection with Great Bowden Church. The church of St. Mary-in-Arden is generally supposed to have received its name from the Forest of Arden, which, about the time the old church is said to have been built, in 1066, may have extended as far as Harborough and joined with the Forest of Rockingham. The original church was destroyed by the steeple falling on it in 1658, and the present church, incorporating a small part of the original, was built at the end of the same century. Hill and some other writers suggest that the name Arden may have referred to Rockingham Forest, in which part of the parish south of the Welland was situated. There is, however, historical evidence in favour of the name having been derived from the Forest of Arden. Between the rivers Welland and Nene the Forest of Rockingham once surrounded the Royal hunting lodge—for such it undoubtedly was, besides being a defensive stronghold—of Rockingham Castle, extending to the confines of Harborough; and as far as the north bank of the Welland there may have extended in early times the south-east boundary of Arden Forest. So great was the extent of these forests that at one time all may have formed a continuous woodland, Leighfield joining Rockingham and Sherwood. As will be seen in a later chapter, the exact boundaries of Leighfield Forest are recorded, the forest having been planted by Edward I

to preserve the deer which he found in the vicinity; but the presence of these probably implies the existence of an earlier wood. In fact, Rockingham itself, according to tradition, once joined Sherwood Forest. The town of Harborough was thus in early times in the centre of a great hunting district; the red deer, the wild boar and the wolf were the beasts of the chase. There were other great hunting lodges not far away, besides Rockingham Castle—Braybrooke Castle,

LOOKING TOWARDS HARBOROUGH FROM THE MARSTON HILLS.

of which little trace remains, and King John's hunting lodge near the River Nene at Whiston.

After the disafforestation, when in time the Valley of the Welland and the southern half of Leicestershire became famous as an arable and later as a grazing country, the annals of Harborough are little concerned with hunting in any form, until a much later date. The stirring events which centred round it during the Civil War, the development of agriculture, of roads and road transport, and its varied industries have given it a page in history peculiarly its own, and not until long after the rise of fox-hunting do we find it rivalling Melton.

The difference between Market Harborough and Melton Mowbray is that the former abounds in historical interest, apart from its hunting fame, while the latter rose from obscurity as a great centre of fox-hunting; but we are mainly concerned with Market Harborough as a rival to Melton in the latter respect and not with its wider historical past. Its real fame as a hunting centre began with Whyte Melville's well-known novel, which brought it prominently before readers of hunting literature. Meanwhile there is a gap to be filled between the time when Meynell gave up the Mastership of the Quorn and Whyte Melville's day, and the names which stand out in the history of the Harborough country at this period above all others are Thomas Assheton Smith and George Osbaldeston.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT DAYS OF QUORN COUNTRY

"Lord Sefton will take my hounds at the end of the season, and I know he hopes to succeed me in hunting the country."—HUGO MEYNELL in 1800.

THE brilliant period in the history of the Quorn which commenced with Lord Sefton's Mastership and continued through a long succession of Masters, who hunted the whole country until its division in 1856, after Sir Richard Sutton's death, is an epoch unrivalled for its splendour in the annals of fox-hunting. Splendour is, indeed, the only word which describes the scenes at the beginning of this Golden Age, apart from the intrinsic qualities of the sport itself. Lord Sefton brought to the hunting field a pageantry it had never known before; he has been described as carrying on the hunt with "great magnificence," and his successors, though not always doing things on such a grand scale, had the support of some of the finest horsemen and wealthiest patrons who were ever associated with the hunting field. Shortly before the period closed, the great meet at Rolleston to celebrate the return to the country of Assheton Smith and his hounds was attended by a field of two thousand. Seventeen hundred horsemen, a third of them in scarlet, were counted by an observer going through one gateway! This was a reversal of conditions in Meynell's early days, when the hounds outnumbered the field with a vengeance, and the day was more of a holiday than a hunt; but it was a tribute to the popularity of a great Master and proof of what Leicestershire and the surrounding shires could do when they wished to honour him.

So brilliant a gathering was led by Lord Sefton that he was criticised as caring little for hounds, but making much of the standard of men and horses; on the other hand, the pace the hounds went made it difficult for some of his followers to find horses which could keep up with them. There is no doubt that the pace of hunting in Leicestershire increased rapidly after Meynell's time, though he had inaugurated the quicker methods, and fences having

increased also, the standard of riding required was very much higher. Towards the end of Meynell's reign the Leicestershire countryside was changing; the large pastures were being strongly fenced, and, in the Harborough district especially, the oxer was becoming more common than the old boundary fences.

Nimrod writes a little later, "the fences in the Market Harborough country are the strongest in Leicestershire," and he devotes a paragraph or two to the great double oxers, of which the remains can be seen to-day:

"The ox-fence peculiar to this part of the kingdom, is considered to be the most formidable; and from the description I shall give of it, my readers must be aware that it is sometimes a stopper, not only to the ox, but to the high-bred hunter, with ever so good a man upon his back. When bullocks, however, get fresh in condition, and the gad-fly gets about them, it requires a strong fence to prevent their breaking through, as they will run almost anywhere to avoid them. The ox-fence is formed thus: first there is a wide ditch; secondly, a strong blackthorn hedge, which in that rich country grows luxuriantly;* and about two yards beyond the hedge is a strong single rail about four feet high. Now from whichever side this fence is approached, the exertion to clear it must be considerable. If one approach it from the inner or ditch side, we have not only the ditch and hedge to clear, but the rail also, which is generally strong enough to throw all but the heavy weights down, if their horses do not clear it; and if they do, it takes something out of them, which is not very easily replaced in a quick thing. If the fence be approached from the rail side the *fly* is tremendous; and if, after clearing all, the horse alights in the furrow instead of on the top of the land, the drop is most distressing to him."

It was, we may think, more distressing to Nimrod, which explains the meticulous care with which he describes the obstacle. But the oxer was something of a terror to all but the hardest riders, and its appearance in the once open and thinly-fenced pastures was giving Leicestershire a formidable reputation for visitors, who, like Nimrod, were lured from the Provinces by the fame of the Quorn. Double oxers were also becoming common in the country south of the Leicester–Uppingham road, and the district round Harborough was looked upon as the final test for riders in the Shires.

We do not, however, at this time hear much of Harborough itself as a hunting centre; the celebrity of Melton was growing rapidly, and there the *élite* gathered to hunt with the Quorn.

* All hedges are grown of whitethorn, but "blackthorn" is often incorrectly used by hunting writers.

Early in the nineteenth century the name Quorn was not always used, the fixtures being advertised, for instance, as Mr. Meynell's Hounds, or Lord Foley's Hounds, after these Masters had ceased to officiate (thus causing confusion when looking through the files of old newspapers), much as the Fernie Hunt was until quite recently known as Mr. Fernie's. On the other hand, about 1824, the Quorn fixtures were always given as the Quorndon Hounds, though the title was dropped later for a few years when Lord Southampton took the Mastership.

ONE OF THE OLD OXERS.

During the ten years that Assheton Smith hunted the country, succeeding Lord Foley, there are many great runs recorded, two of the best ending in the present Fernie country: one of forty-seven minutes from the Coplow to Hallaton, and the other one hour and twenty-seven minutes, from Cream Gorse to Stockerston, a kill resulting on both occasions. Assheton Smith often cited these two runs as the finest in his experience of Leicestershire. Fences of many kinds were now to be encountered. The great feats of horsemanship which have made the name of Assheton Smith famous include the jumping of such awkward

obstacles as a stile on the top of a bank, which pounded the whole field, a six-barred gate into a narrow lane, and out over another gate, every variety of oxer, and that particular kind of thorn fence which so impressed Nimrod, " with a yawning ditch on one side; but the hedge is not only strongly plashed at the top, but *made to lean towards the field whereon it grows*." In the words of Nimrod's well-known description, Assheton Smith combined " the character of a skilful sportsman with that of a desperate horseman . . . unquestionably possessing, *on every occasion and at every hour of the day*, the most bulldog-like nerve ever exhibited in the saddle. His motto was, ' I'll live with my hounds '; and all those who have seen him in the field must acknowledge he made no vain boast of his prowess. His falls were countless; and no wonder, for he rode at places which *he knew* no horse could get over; but his object was to get, one way or the other, into the field with his hounds."

That Assheton Smith was the right man to carry on the style of hunting then becoming associated with Leicestershire is proved by a criticism passed on his methods by George Carter, who later on was his huntsman some days in the week in Hampshire (in Leicestershire Assheton Smith always carried the horn), which is quoted by Blew :

" He *would ride*, for you see he were a wonderful horseman, but his ways and mine didn't always agree. I liked to find a fox and have an hour and a half with him or more, and then kill him if I could, and somehow or other I could generally do that; but you see, Sir, Mr. Smith used to say, ' What's the good of coddling about after a fox all day ? ' and if he hunted one for forty minutes and didn't catch him, why then he gave him up and went and tried for another; and as soon as he had tired one horse, he had another to get on, and so it didn't signify; but I always knew what Mr. Smith's hounds were. Why, then, I remember one day we met at Weyhill; Mr. Smith came out as a gentleman, and I hunted the hounds. Well, Sir, we found a fox at Ramridge . . . and just before we came to Chute Lodge, there were a bit of plough, and I see a hound called Nabob feathering up a furrow and none o' the others could own it; but I know'd he were right, so I just said quietly, ' Heic, Nabob, Heic.'

" ' What are you heicing for there ? ' says Mr. Smith.

" ' I beg your pardon, Sir,' I says, ' but you see Nabob has got his line; he can't speak to it on the plough, but as soon as we get on the grass they will all open.' And sure enough, Sir, as soon as we got to the park palings, and through, away they went, and we killed our fox after a good hunting run."

A certain impatience and also jealousy if his riding exploits were rivalled in the field was always a characteristic of Assheton Smith (he was very annoyed

with Tom Heycock, another fine rider of that day, for taking a very high gate after he had himself made the same spectacular leap, thereby sharing the applause which followed his own performance); but although he may be accused of jealousy and playing to the gallery to a certain extent, many of his most famous leaps either left him alone with hounds or were performed when he was in that enviable position, with no audience to applaud him or rivals to be jealous of. And no Master had a warmer welcome than Assheton Smith when he returned to his former country after an absence of twenty years.

The great meet at Rolleston previously mentioned took place on March 20th, 1840, when he brought his hounds for a day's hunting in Leicestershire at the invitation of Mr. Greene of Rolleston, who succeeded Mr. Hodgson the next season, as Master of the Quorn. The first draw was at Shangton Holt, where, in the words of Sir John Eardley Wilmot, his biographer, " more than two thousand horsemen assembled. Men of the highest birth and station, men who had served their country with deeds of most daring gallantry by sea and land, men who in political or social life were the most brilliant in repute, thronged to do honour to the first fox-hunter of the day. They had come from remote countries, and more were pouring in along the grassy slopes and vales, or skirting the well-known gorse coverts. As Dick Christian remarked, ' the first lot were at Shangton Holt when the tail end wern't out of Rolleston gates.' "

What a gathering that must have been ! It was twenty years since Assheton Smith had resigned the Mastership of the Quorn, yet there were " grey-headed horsemen hurrying forward to shake hands with their old friend and fellow sportsman, each calling vividly to memory some scene where he had acted the most conspicuous part," while younger men, Sir Francis Goodriche, Colonel Lowther, Lord Wilton, Lord Archibald St. Maur, George Payne, Little Gilmour, George Anson, and many others pressed forward to make the acquaintance of one of whose exploits " by flood and field " they had so often heard. The roads approaching Rolleston were packed with riders, scarlet and black mingled in an apparently endless procession; some wore the white collar of the Pytchley or the livery of other Hunts, for many fields must have been thinned that day; and a vast concourse of carriages and coaches followed in the wake of the horsemen, besides an enormous crowd of foot-people. It was almost impossible to draw Shangton Holt, the crowd streaming round the covert from all directions, and hounds were only put into the lower end. It was a day of brilliant sunlight, with a bitterly cold north-east wind, and very bad for scent. The hounds were next taken to Norton Gorse, Stonton Wood, and Glooston Wood, all being drawn blank. At last a fox was found in Vowe's Gorse, at four in the

afternoon, and from here hounds went away towards Horninghold, skirting Blaston. Assheton Smith seems to have been well to the fore, according to an account in *The Sporting Magazine*, clearing a stiff flight of rails into a road in his old style. Empty saddles were soon in evidence, but eventually the two thousand, or what was left of them, reached the Welland. The fox crossed the river and made for Rockingham Park, when, owing to the lateness of the hour, hounds were whipped off. The pack was admirably handled by Dick Burton.

ROLLESTON WOOD.

According to Dick Burton's own story, the scent was bad all day, and the run of an hour and twenty minutes was disappointing. He gives an account of a curious incident which took place before the meet :

" The horse Antwerp, which Mr. Smith intended to ride, got some skin knocked off his hips going by train. I told Mr. Smith of the accident, as he was disfigured. He said, ' I will ride him and no other ; can't you get some paint of the same colour ? ' So I did, and painted the place, and he did ride the horse that day."

Squire Osbaldeston, who succeeded Assheton Smith, has a good deal to say

about the Harborough country in his autobiography, though Market Harborough is only mentioned once or twice in the book, and then casually during the account of a run; Melton itself is only mentioned on three occasions. Many of the now famous coverts are not alluded to, at least by their present names; some bore other names, but many had not been planted. Shangton Holt is one of the oldest, and was always remembered by Osbaldeston:

"During the fifth year of my Mastership, I met with two accidents—the first cost me a fortnight's hunting, the consequences keeping me out of the saddle for that period; the other, a serious one, which obliged me to resign the Mastership, was due to the reckless riding of an intimate friend.

"The first occurred at Shangton Holt (a certain find), the ground about which covert is very uneven. The horse I rode was a favourite of mine, Waterloo by name, very fast, a capital fencer, with a beautiful snaffle mouth; his fault was a trick of carrying his head rather high, and to this, I imagine, the accident was due. Hounds were drawing the covert and I galloped round it to see that the field left the coast clear to get away. Waterloo came down on the rough ground, rolled over me and broke two of my ribs, I did not know this at the time; my side was very painful as I remounted and followed in the wake of the hounds till they marked their fox to ground after a run of three miles, and only when I called in a physician was it discovered that ribs had been broken."

The second accident was when he broke his leg near Charnwood Forest, being knocked over and jumped on by Sir James Musgrave. It is said in excuse for the latter, who rode on when Osbaldeston called out to him, that he did not understand what had happened; this may possibly have been the case, but, as Nimrod would say, "the pace was too good to enquire." Cecil quoted Sir James as having shouted "What does it matter! Hounds are running!" according to the account given him by Osbaldeston himself.

An extraordinary incident which took place at Hallaton Bottoms is described in the Autobiography. A fox had gone to ground, and having been dug out and accounted for, the terrier bayed what was apparently a second fox, but turned out to be a badger. When the hunt returned after killing their fox, the badger had been put into a bag by twenty "stocking makers and similar people" who had assisted in getting out the fox. As they had been paid for their services, Osbaldeston politely asked whether he might keep the badger. During the discussion Sebright, his whipper-in, who had dismounted, was knocked down. Whereupon Osbaldeston, the whip having mounted and the second whip having arrived, led a charge upon the gang. In his own words:

SHANGTON HOLT

"Taken by surprise they scattered and ran in different directions, but we knocked several of them down before they could get away. The man who carried the badger ran as well as he could for his load, towards a thick gorse covert, thinking we could not follow. I had my eye upon him and soon caught him in the covert. He dropped the sack and seized hold of my bridle. I rose in my stirrups and hit him on the hands with the butt end of my whip, which made him quickly let go. Then I gave him a few hard knocks with my fist and drove him off. The whippers-in came at my call and took the badger, while the men from a respectable distance swore at us, saying they would kill all the foxes and uttered other threats."

The extraordinary part of the story is that there was no retaliation, the covert always providing foxes as it had done in the past. It speaks volumes for the good nature of the Hallaton men, but, used as they were to their annual—and at that time very rough—custom of bottle-kicking, they no doubt took the encounter in a sporting spirit.

This sporting spirit is one of which the men of Leicestershire may be proud. With the rapid growth of fox-hunting, for which the farmers of the country had as much enthusiasm as the squires and visitors who came from every part of the kingdom, there developed a good feeling among all classes which sport alone can give, and which hunting in particular has always fostered. The times of Osbaldeston were in some ways rough and crude—the modern refinements of the sport were yet to come, and such glories as Lord Sefton had introduced were rather on the surface of things. In the grand old Squire the true spirit of hunting predominated, and there were few in the countryside who had a word against him. Such men as he have made Leicestershire famous, and the breed is as strong as ever to-day. The Harborough country has been particularly fortunate in its great sportsmen—but this is anticipating: the names of Tailby and Fernie belong to a later day. There were to be many Quorn Masters before the country was divided and Market Harborough had its place in the annals of the hunting field.

CHAPTER V

WHYTE MELVILLE

"Market Harborough . . . perhaps the best head-quarters in the world for fox-hunting." WHYTE MELVILLE.

FEW novels have done so much for a locality as Whyte Melville's romance to which he gave for title the name of the town we are considering. Not that Market Harborough in real life owes its fame entirely to "Market Harborough" the book, but the excellent reasons advanced by Mr. Sawyer for his choice of residence in the Shires—after many places had been dismissed from his mind for one cause or another, and Melton had been finally abandoned, in spite of an extra glass or two of champagne, on account of the limitations of his pocket—were so indubitably sound that many potential Mr. Sawyers were led to decide likewise. "Strike me ugly, if I won't go to Market Harborough!" exclaims the hero of the book, flinging the end of his cigar under the grate. "I'm going to have a look at Mr. Tailby," he says to his groom, "and see if I can't make a fight good enough to see those Pytchley bitches run into their fox. I am going to Market Harborough, Isaac."

Isaac's reception of this decision was chilly. "Market 'Arborow! Market 'Arborow! five days a week, bullock fences, and a wet country! Thorns, stubs, cracked heels, and hawful wear an' tear of horses! No—I couldn't have believed it of him!"

The old groom's first impressions were not reassuring:

"Eight and forty hours more saw old Isaac stamping drearily about on the wet pavement of that excellent sporting locality. Market Harborough . . . can scarcely be termed a gay or very beautiful town. On a wet drizzling afternoon in early winter, when twilight begins somewhere about 2.45, with no movable object visible save a deserted carrier's cart, and a small rain falling, which dulls the red brick houses while it polishes the paved and slippery streets, it is, doubtless, a city suggestive of repose, not to say stagnation. Isaac's was a

temperament sufficiently susceptible of all unpleasant influences ; and he began to wish heartily he hadn't come. A variety of disadvantages had occurred to him since his arrival. The price of forage and stabling he considered enormous. The conveniences of hot water were not what he was accustomed to at home.

MARKET HARBOROUGH.

Hotspur did by no means feed well in a strange box : the horse had begun to look poorer day by day since he left the dealers. And last night The Boy, who had never been from home before, certainly smelt of gin when he came to bed."

Before going to the Shires Mr. Sawyer visited the best firm in London for

making a workmanlike top-boot. " Very muscular gentleman ! " remarks the foreman, passing a tape round Mr. Sawyer's calf : " Excuse me, Sir : take the liberty of asking whereabouts you generally hunt."

" ' Hunt ? ' repeated the customer. ' Oh ! Leicestershire—Northamptonshire—all about there—in the neighbourhood of Market Harborough.' Mr. Sawyer spoke in a vague general sort of way, as if he was in the habit of pervading the whole of the grazing districts.

" A cloud gathered on the foreman's brow.

" ' The Shires ! ' he rejoined with a perplexed air ; ' that increases our difficulties very much indeed. I could have made you, now, a particular neat *provincial* boot ; but with this pattern it's exceedingly difficult to attain the correct appearance for flying countries.' "

We must now take a look at Market Harborough as Mr. Sawyer found it.

The Midland Railway main line through Harborough was opened about 1861, but in 1854, two years before Mr. Tailby took the country, a branch line was opened between Rugby and Stamford, which passed through the town. Mr. Bland prints in his book " Bygone Days in Market Harborough " the first time-table issued in the town for this line. There was a train from Stamford at 7.35 a.m. which reached Harborough at 8.29, and another from Rugby at 10.5 a.m., arriving at Harborough at 10.47. There was also a later train from each place in the morning and one in the afternoon. These railway facilities, culminating a few years later in the main line to London, had an immediate effect on the fortunes of the town. Opposition and dislike were, of course, natural on the part of sportsmen and others. " ' It's all over with hunting, my Lord,' said an old Pytchley huntsman to the grandfather of the present Lord Spencer . . . ' these canals they are cutting must ruin it. There will be no getting across them with hounds ! ' This is exactly what, a few years later, everyone felt about railways, and these have indeed scoured the Midland pastures with many tracks, and undoubtedly they have saved the life of many a fox. . . . But railways, though often a trial to huntsmen and occasionally a danger to hounds, have been far less of a hindrance to hunting than might have been expected. In one sense they have been a blessing in disguise, for had there been no railways there would have been more canals, and the latter are a very serious impediment to sport." * Dale says further, " As far as Market Harborough is concerned, no town has felt the benefit of railway extension more." In spite of this optimistic view of railways in a hunting country, some

* Dale, " Fox-hunting in the Shires."

of the finest districts round Harborough were grievously cut into, especially round Medbourne, where, at a later date, a loop-line made a complete triangle like that at John o' Gaunt, but over a larger area. Even Dale writes, " I cannot see John o' Gaunt as a railway junction without a shock." But railways did not worry Mr. Sawyer, and, partly on account of them, he found the hotels and stables of Harborough crowded with sportsmen and their horses.

Many of the old inns had gone, including the original Bell Inn, which once covered the whole frontage of the square from the corner of the Coventry Road to the present premises of the Northampton Brewery Company.* The Three Swans, dating from 1507, remained, however, with its fine hammered iron sign, and there were, among others, The Angel, The Peacock, and The Hind ; the latter is mentioned in the Town Records in 1365. At the time of which Whyte Melville wrote the majority of sportsmen stayed at these hotels. Now, alas ! their yards, like the yards of the old inns at Melton, are practically deserted, except on market days, when they are filled with cars and traps.

For Mr. Sawyer, as he sat at breakfast the morning after his arrival in Harborough, the High Street and square must have been an inspiring sight. Long strings of horses at exercise went past his hotel, and others were starting early for a distant meet. It would be idle to attempt a calculation of the number of fine hunters stabled in the town in those days, more even than in the later days before the war, when it was no uncommon sight to see several hundred horses in one string leaving the town on a hunting morning. There was not a box to spare in the stables, and scarcely standing room in the yards, when the preparation for the day began. Old sportsmen long resident in Harborough talk with regret of these great days, days that will never come back. The era of hunting inns is gone, and with it the many picturesque accompaniments to life in a hunting town.

The more picturesque side of the great October fair, and even the weekly market, when the cattle used to stand in the streets, is gone too. Every Tuesday the square was packed with sheep, the air vibrated with their bleating and the sharp bark of the sheep-dogs ; shepherds on their rough ponies drove their flocks into the town in the early morning, the clear light diffused over the square revealing a scene of colour and movement, flocks jostling together as they were guided into their pens, dogs hurrying their charges from one corner to another, the ponies of the dismounted shepherds standing patiently in the crowd. During the October fair the horses were grouped along the High Street, bays,

* Bland, " Bygone Days in Market Harborough."

browns, and chestnuts, some with halters, rough from the fields, others well-groomed, ridden in by their owners. All along the Coventry and Fairfield roads, and in the cricket field which was known as Cowfair Close, were the cattle. Mr. Bland describes how in the narrow parts of the streets the windows of the shops and houses were boarded up, and the footpaths temporarily fenced in. The fair lasted nine days, attracting the usual crowd of caravans, and generally a circus as well.

Such was Market Harborough in the days of Mr. Sawyer, when he plunged enthusiastically into the atmosphere of horse-coping so admirably conveyed in the book. Not that Mr. Sawyer attended the fair as more than a spectator; his business was done in the hunting field, and very brisk and lively he found it.

As a picture of this side of hunting life the novel has never been equalled; in other ways it " dates " a great deal more than the work of older writers. It is full of slang terms not appreciated or understood now, the slang of an age less forceful than that of which Nimrod wrote. Good as the descriptions of hunting are, they do not come near Nimrod's immortal " Quarterly Run." It is interesting to take a typical extract from each author, by way of comparison. We will have Nimrod first; the scene is the Whissendine :

" ' Yooi, over he goes ! ' holloas the Squire, as he perceives Joker and Jewell plunging into the stream, and Red-rose shaking herself on the opposite bank. Seven men, out of thirteen, take it in their stride; three stop short, their horses refusing the first time, but come well over in the second; and three find themselves in the middle of it. The gallant Frank Forester is among the latter; and having been requested that morning to wear a friend's new coat, to take off the gloss and glare of the shop, he accomplishes the task to perfection in the bluish-black mud of the Whissendine, only then subsiding after a three days' flood. ' Who is that under his horse in the brook ? ' enquires that good sportsman and fine rider, Mr. Greene, of Rolleston, whose noted old mare had just skimmed over the water like a swallow on a summer's evening. ' It's Middleton Biddulph,' says one. ' Pardon me,' cries Mr. Middleton Biddulph; ' Middleton Biddulph is here, *and here he means to be !* ' ' Only Dick Christian,' answers Lord Forester, ' and it's nothing new to him.' ' But he'll be drowned,' exclaims Lord Kinnaird. ' I shouldn't wonder,' observes Mr. William Coke. But the pace is *too good* to enquire."

Then Whyte Melville :

" The scene that met Mr. Sawyer's eyes was amusing, though alarming. Four *imperial crowners* at one and the same instant—four loose horses galloping wildly away—four red coats rising simultaneously from Mother Earth—eight

A RAIN-STORM OVER ROLLESTON

Blenheim Spinney in the middle distance

top-booted legs shuffling in ludicrous haste after the departing steeds. Had our friend been Briareus himself, he could not have caught all their horses. He was a man, however, who seldom lost an opportunity, and was not likely to miss such a chance as the present. Selecting Boadicea, he galloped after her, and succeeded in pinning her against a pound: notwithstanding that the mare lashed out at him more than once, he brought her back in triumph to her panting owner.

"Meanwhile the four dismounted sportsmen condoled breathlessly with each other.

"'I'm but a poor hand at *this* game,' observed Struggles, who did not fancy carrying his own weight across country.

"'I wish I'd gone faster at it,' said Savage, who had been grinding his teeth and hardening his heart the whole way up the field.

"'My chestnut mare would have jumped it!' exclaimed Major Brush, inwardly registering a vow to abstain from 'Oxers' for the future; whilst the Honourable, though he held his tongue, was thinking what a capital horse that was of Sawyer's, and dismally reflecting that if Boadicea hadn't kicked at him when he was down, he never would have been such a tailor as to let her go.

"'Catch hold!' said Mr. Sawyer, throwing the mare's reins to her owner, whose gratitude he thereby earned for the rest of his life. 'There's no hurry,' he added, as the Honourable, in a coat plastered with mud and a hat stove in, dived wildly at his stirrup; 'They've over-run it a mile back, and checked in the next field.'"

The passage has points of similarity with Nimrod's and a difference: "imperial crowner" and "tailor" are slang terms which sound old-fashioned to-day, whereas there is not a word in Nimrod's long description of his fictitious run which does not convey its meaning at once; there is, in fact, no slang at all in spite of the racy style in which the whole is written. The point would be hardly worth noticing, except that the popularity of Whyte Melville as a sporting writer has waned, while Nimrod is going as strong as ever. But "Market Harborough" is too good a book to be forgotten, and is well worthy of a reprint, with modern refinements of type and binding, such as has been accorded to many sporting classics in recent years. It is a long, rambling, yet vivid tale of hunting, horse-coping, and sentiment—the sentiment, perhaps, its feeblest quality, for Whyte Melville's ladies hardly attract the reader as they did the impressionable Mr. Sawyer.

The book, however, reflects the genial personality of its author on every page, and a more engaging personality never graced the hunting field. He was

not, according to Brooksby, who has left an eloquent tribute to his friend, a really great horseman, but he had wonderful hands ; and though it was rather a point of pride with him to end the day with a coat as clean as when he came out (he had a great dislike to getting dirty) he took his fences pretty well as they came on a line which he chose for himself. As Brooksby says : " He went out to amuse himself and did it thoroughly—seeing a great deal of hounds and

" COMING THEIR IMPERIAL CROWNERS."

picking his way where he and his horse could best learn to adjust themselves to each other's taste. Nothing was more pleasant to him than to educate a willing well-bred pupil to jump to his hand and gallop on the finger."

The event of the day's hunting always looked forward to by friends of Whyte Melville was the ride home in the evening ; then they enjoyed to the full in his conversation the qualities which animate his books, the racy descriptions and kindly humour, the gossip of the hour and tales of the chase ; then, also, Whyte Melville himself saw in imagination his Honourable Crashers and John Standish Sawyers living the life of which he never grew tired, taking their fences and

coming their imperial crowners, buying and selling their horses, doing each other and being done with a cheerful good nature all the time, and making love in the most gentlemanly manner to the Miss Doves and Miss Merlins of their day. And as their creator rode into Harborough, when the lights were shining across inn-yards on tired horses and mud-stained saddles, when the windows of the inns were lit up, and under the swinging signs the glow of warm light fell upon scarlet coats, white cords and top-boots caked with the good old Leicestershire soil, he found a setting after his heart for the puppets whose fortunes he directed : then, before ever he appeared in print, Mr. Sawyer decided to go to Market Harborough, and posterity has agreed that his decision was the right one, in spite of those extra glasses of champagne and the alluring temptations of Melton.

PART II

THE BILLESDON HUNT

CHAPTER I

THE DIVISION OF THE COUNTRY

" The Melton men, ah ! where are they,
With Tailby on the grass away ? "

THE COSTON RUN.

WHAT might have been considered the first step towards the formation of a Hunt taking the name of the Billesdon was the erection at Billesdon of magnificent new kennels and stabling for the Quorn Hunt by Lord Suffield in 1838 (at a cost of £4,500), but for the fact that Lord Suffield's Mastership lasted only one season, and, although the Billesdon kennels were used by Mr. Hodgson, who succeeded him, and by Mr. Greene of Rolleston, the Hunt returned to its old kennels and title when Sir Richard Sutton became Master in 1847. During the years between there were many changes of pack and *personnel* in Quorn country. The sport under Lord Suffield was disappointing : his hounds were unsuited to the country, and his lavish expenditure exceeded his means. John Mills, in his book, " The Sporting Life of England," gives the following amusing conversation :

" Upon one occasion his Lordship complained to his stud-groom of the want of condition in his horses.

" ' I can't help it,' was the brief and somewhat surly reply.

" ' Can't help it ? ' repeated his Lordship, surprise portrayed in every feature, ' and why not ? '

" ' Because I ain't got no corn,' added the stud-groom.

" ' Immediately apply to the steward, then,' said his master angrily.

" ' I did, my Lord, this morning,' replied the man ; ' but he told me it was no use coming to him, as the corn-dealer would stand tick no longer.'

" ' That's an unpleasant circumstance,' said his Lordship reflectively.

" ' Yes, and so I said at the time, my Lord,' returned the servant, ' but he said he couldn't help it—that none of the tradesmen would give any more credit except the pastry-cook.'

" ' Damn it ! if that's the case, feed your horses *on jelly*,' replied his master, after a pause for the hatching of a remedy."

The kennels at Billesdon were built on such a magnificent scale that when Mr. Tailby eventually took the country and made his headquarters at Billesdon, new kennels were constructed, Lord Suffield's, in the words of Cecil, being used as " tenements for the human race." *

It is only fair to Lord Suffield to record that before his retirement there were two fine runs, one of which is claimed as among the best ever seen in Leicestershire. The first was from Shearsby Gorse, hounds running mute for three-quarters of an hour at a great pace and killing their fox near Gumley, where they ate him up, " brush and all," before the Master, huntsman or field could catch up with them. The second—a really great run—was from Cream Gorse, through Little Dalby, over Burrough Hill, to John o' Gaunt, where the fox was viewed entering the covert. Hounds turned him out and he made for Lowesby, finding refuge in a drain; Treadwell, the huntsman, was well up, and six or seven of the field had just managed to keep hounds in view, though some way behind. The distance was about fourteen miles and the time a few minutes over an hour. The Shearsby run was followed by several other good runs in the next few seasons which added to the fame of the Harborough country at that time, a fame which was further increased by the excellent sport shown by Mr. Richard Sutton, who ably carried on its traditions from Skeffington, where new kennels were built, during the last years of his father's Mastership of the Quorn, and the remainder of the season in which Sir Richard Sutton's death caused further changes in the country.

The arrangement by which Mr. Richard Sutton hunted the Harborough side, which eventually contributed towards the division of Quorn country, was purely one of convenience for Sir Richard. The latter, being very conscientious and indefatigable in his efforts to show the best possible sport, ably assisted by his huntsman, Tom Day, felt that he could not do justice to the whole country. Mr. Richard Sutton hunted his own hounds with Ben Boothroyd as 1st whip and kennel-huntsman. Few periods in the history of the Quorn have shown a better average of sport, foxes being scrupulously preserved and very numerous. Sir Richard's sudden death at the age of fifty-seven was a great blow to the Hunt, and although another of his sons, Captain Francis Sutton, formed a scratch pack and hunted the district north of the Wreake for the rest of the season, with Tom Day as huntsman, neither he nor his brother was willing to accept the Mastership, or continue hunting any part of the country, when the season came to an end.

In 1856, the year after Sir Richard Sutton's death, the whole of Quorn

* The stabling was taken over by Mr. Tailby.

country, extending from Castle Donington in the north to Market Harborough in the south, became vacant. The Quorn Committee approached Lord Stamford to take the Mastership. Lord Stamford was at length persuaded to take the northern portion of the Quorn, only arguing that he agreed with Sir Richard's decision that the whole country was too large for one Hunt. There was still, apparently, a hope that Mr. Richard Sutton might continue to hunt the Harborough side. Some authors, including Mr. Blew, state that Lord Stamford took the country north of the Wreake, but there is no record of the present Quorn Friday country being included in the Harborough country, nor of Mr. Tailby having taken the country north of the Leicester–Uppingham road. Possibly the Wreake was decided on as the boundary when it was thought that Mr. Richard Sutton would continue hunting from Skeffington, the river having been the division between the portion hunted by the two brothers for a few months after their father's death. In any case the boundary must have been readjusted almost immediately, because meets of Lord Stamford's hounds took place in the Friday country from the commencement of his Mastership.

A consideration that affected the division was the number of foxes in the Donington country at that time; it was literally overrun with them, and there were threats that measures would be taken to keep the foxes down if the country was not regularly hunted. Much pressure was brought to bear on Lord Stamford, when it was certain that Mr. Richard Sutton would give up his hounds, to persuade him to hunt the Billesdon side, but he remained firm to his decision, and the country was definitely abandoned by the Quorn. There was no immediate prospect of anyone hunting it when Mr. Tailby came forward with an offer to take it over. In his own words, it was "a derelict country." This point must be remembered with regard to the unfortunate dispute that took place several years later, on Mr. Tailby's resignation, when Mr. Coupland claimed the Harborough country for the Quorn. The distinction must also be realised between the conditions under which Mr. Tailby hunted the Billesdon or Harborough country and those under which he took over a part of the Cottesmore territory, the latter being from the first a loan, with the condition that it was to be restored to the Cottesmore Hunt if a member of the Lowther family claimed it at any future date. This distinction was strongly emphasised by Mr. Tailby when any discussion with regard to his country arose.

The Daily Telegraph, in its obituary notice of Mr. Tailby on January 6th, 1914, contains the following account of how he formed his pack:

"The preliminary arrangements having been completed for Mr. Tailby to hunt the country, he had to cast about for a pack of hounds—a consideration of paramount importance. With a very discerning judgment he enlisted the co-operation of the experienced and veteran Tom Day, and a sale at the Quorn kennels resulted in eleven and a half couples being transferred to Billesdon. Mr. Tailby also purchased ten couples from the Pytchley, and some smaller

VIXEN AND HALF-GROWN CUBS.

lots from Lord Fitzwilliam and Mr. Milbanke, and other hounds from various kennels of repute; altogether he made a start with thirty-seven couples, and they were not long in demonstrating that they could hunt a fox to some purpose.

"After the end of the first season, 'Jack' Goddard—subsequently huntsman to the Quorn—came as huntsman to Mr. Tailby's hounds, and such was the sport shown that it became quite the fashion in the Shires to 'swear by Tailby's hounds.'

"In addition to the season's entry, bred at Billesdon, Mr. Tailby bought

two lots of four couples each at Mr. Drake's sale, for which he gave 405 guineas. It was thought at the time a stiffish price, but there was a deal of the fashionable Belvoir blood in the hounds brought into Leicestershire."

Cecil also has a paragraph on the formation of Mr. Tailby's pack and some subsequent sales after he had given up the Cottesmore portion of his country and wished to reduce his establishment. The paragraph is interesting as showing the very good prices eventually fetched by some of his hounds :

" Mr. Tailby made a famous commencement of his pack, securing many choice celebrities of Sir Richard Sutton's breeding, in addition to lots from the Pytchley, Lord Fitzwilliam's, and other crack kennels. In subsequent years a good hit was made by having recourse to Earl Fitzhardinge's Andover, whose produce was superlatively good, as I can personally testify, having on different occasions seen them distinguish themselves to admiration. The Belvoir blood has also been judiciously introduced ; and Struggler, who came unentered from Sir Watkin Wynn's, was at an early age promoted to the honours of paternity, having six couples to represent him in the entry of 1871. The reduction of the limits of the country led to an equivalent reduction of the pack. Messrs. Tattersall were again in requisition, so Mr. Payne was in the rostrum at Skeffington, April 6th, 1872, who succeeded in obtaining biddings for twenty-four couples of working hounds, the dog pack, to the amount of 1625 guineas, producing an average of nearly twice what Mr. Richard Sutton's were sold for. Eight couples and a half of unentered hounds were disposed of for 335 guineas. These excellent prices may be readily explained ; the hounds were of great and well-known intrinsic worth, and there was a goodly company present, including the Duke of Grafton, Earl of Lonsdale, Mr. Hope Barton, and Mr. Oakley as purchasers." *

After the introduction of the Belvoir blood, through the hounds purchased at Mr. Drake's sale in 1862, the Billesdon kennels were particularly fortunate with their entry : Nabob, Nero, and Norma especially distinguished themselves, all descended from Noble, according to Cecil " a black and white hound, showing great style and quality, a son of Lord Yarborough's Noble, and the Duke of Rutland's Dulcet " ; the farmer who had walked Norma was awarded one of the cups annually presented by Mr. Tailby. By Lord Fitzhardinge's Andover he bred a fine bitch, Actress, and Clasher and Judy were the result of a combination of the Pytchley and Melton strains. Roman and Rattler were by Druid, another " dark black and white hound, with little tan, of great bone, proclaiming a hardy constitution " and possessed of " the inestimable

* " Records of the Chase."

qualification of nose," a son of Lord Fitzhardinge's Dervis. "It is extremely gratifying to observe," writes the same author, "that Mr. Tailby is well off for walks. This proclaims the popularity he has gained, and the graceful reciprocity which has attended his efforts to show sport. The gentry who make this country their winter's home, kindly assist by walking puppies; but more than that, the prosperous agriculturists join heartily and cheerfully in the good cause. This is the more to be appreciated, inasmuch as it has never been the custom since the days of Meynell, with very few exceptions, for the farms of Leicestershire to contribute their good services after this fashion, till the accession of Mr. Tailby." *

Tom Day, on whose assistance and experience Mr. Tailby had so largely relied in commencing the formation of his pack, resigned the horn in 1857, and Jack Goddard became huntsman. He remained with Mr. Tailby until 1863, when he went to the Quorn; he was succeeded by Frank Goodall from the Cottesmore. Goodall remained for the greater part of the best ten years of Mr. Tailby's Mastership—years that saw an endless succession of great runs and a wonderful average of sport—only leaving the Billesdon Hunt after the curtailing of the country by the return of the Cottesmore portion, when, at the time of the first Quorn claim, Mr. Tailby wished to resign. Goodall was appointed huntsman to the Royal Buckhounds, a post which he retained for fifteen years. For four seasons, however, the Master of the Billesdon carried the horn, afterwards engaging Richard Summers as huntsman, until his eventual resignation in 1878. Then the Quorn made their second claim, and the famous dispute arose concerning the future of the Harborough country.

When, in 1871, Colonel Lowther expressed his intention of hunting the portion of Cottesmore country loaned to Mr. Tailby, the latter disclosed his intention of resigning at the end of the season. The Marquis of Queensberry approached several owners of coverts with a view to becoming his successor, and his proposals were generally accepted, but were withdrawn on Mr. Coupland announcing his intention to claim the country. Mr. Tailby was then requested to reconsider his resignation, and to the satisfaction of the whole Hunt he consented to remain as Master. The hounds were removed from Billesdon to the kennels at Skeffington.

The unfortunate dispute referred to, being a direct result of the division of the country, which is the subject of this chapter, must be briefly outlined here. The dispute, which became very acrimonious, has two redeeming features: the chivalrous and forbearing demeanour of the two chief par-

* "The Billesdon Hunt."

NEAR GAULBY

ticipants, Mr. Coupland and Sir Bache Cunard (Mr. Coupland was the more obstinate of the two, but submitted with very good grace to the decision of the Boodles Committee, Sir Bache Cunard from the first placed his case unreservedly in the hands of the Committee of the Billesdon Hunt); and its fortunately happy ending. The Quorn claim had already been foreshadowed as early as 1859, when Lord Stamford proposed hunting the Billesdon country, a proposal that was at once declined, and the rights of which were justly disputed by Mr. Tailby; and later, as stated, when Mr. Coupland made a tentative proposal in 1871, at the time when Mr. Tailby first intimated a wish to resign. Two letters written to Sir Henry Halford give the proposals made respectively by Mr. Coupland and Sir Bache Cunard:

"GOSCOTE HALL, LEICESTER, *February 26th*, 1878.

"DEAR SIR HENRY,—I don't know that I can say anything more than repeat my former proposal to hunt the country, which Mr. Tailby has resigned —two days a week—provided it is the *general wish* that the old Quorn should be united. My intention is to give up my present kennels at Quorn, which are tumbling down, and remove the establishment to some central spot where justice can be done to all sides of what will then be the Quorn country. My idea of a central situation would be Thurnby, Scraptoft, Beeby, etc., not too far from a railway station. If I hunt this country, I should take all sides in their turn, and make no difference with Holt, Allexton, and Theddingworth than any other. With regard to the matters of detail, I shall be glad to consult those who take an interest in the Hunt. I shall study the interests of the landed proprietors, farmers, and members of the Hunt, and do my best to show sport to all.

I remain,

Yours truly,

J. COUPLAND."

"HALLATON HALL, UPPINGHAM, *February 27th*, 1878.

"DEAR SIR HENRY,—Should it be the general wish of Mr. Tailby's Hunt to keep the country in its present integrity; in case no one comes forward I will hunt the country, with a subscription, on the same terms that Mr. Tailby does, viz.:—five days a fortnight, find hounds, kennels, etc. I make this proposition to the country entirely on the understanding that I shall be supported in my best endeavours to show sport.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

B. CUNARD."

The Billesdon Hunt Committee with Sir Henry Halford as Chairman decided by a large majority to accept Sir Bache Cunard's offer, and this decision being communicated to Mr. Coupland, Sir Bache Cunard bought Mr. Tailby's hounds, built kennels at Medbourne, and made all arrangements for hunting the country.

But the decision of the committee being questioned and a long correspondence ensuing, the matter was finally referred to the Masters of Fox Hounds' Committee of Boodle's Club. The decision of this final authority in favour of the continued division of the country, at least during Sir Bache Cunard's Mastership, as being to the general interest of fox-hunting in the United Kingdom, was accepted by Mr. Coupland.

The reception of this verdict by some of the more discontented, if less enlightened, of the disputants was expressed in the indignant comment, " and who *is* this Mr. Boodles ? "

CHAPTER II

SKEFFINGTON HALL

"The seat of Sir William Charles Farrell Skeffington, Baronet, stands on an eminence at an easy distance from the Uppingham Road, 10 miles from Leicester eastwardly, and nine from Uppingham, almost adjoining the village which gives name to this ancient and honourable family, which has been for ages seated here."—THROSBY.

THE foregoing chapter having given the main facts concerning Mr. Tailby's country, his hounds, and his huntsmen, we must now turn to that eminence from which so much of the country can be viewed and on which stands the ancient Hall that was his home for so many years.

The Skeffingtons of Skeffington date back to the time of Edward I and probably much earlier. In the reign of Edward I, one Simon Skeffington lived at the Hall, the father of Geoffrey and John of Tatton. One of the descendants of Geoffrey died without male issue, but the direct line was eventually re-established by the marriage of Elizabeth to William Skeffington, descended from John of Tatton. Three generations later the family began to take a prominent part in county and, afterwards, in national affairs. Sir William Skeffington, knighted by Henry VII, was Sheriff of the counties of Leicester and Warwick, once in the reign of Henry VII, and twice in the reign of Henry VIII; in 1529 he was appointed Commissioner of Ireland, and later Lord Lieutenant, when he subdued the rebels O'More and O'Connor. He had previously been Master of the Ordnance in England. While in Ireland he had "a warm dispute with the Earl of Kildare, and they mutually charged each other with high crimes and misdemeanours at the English Court; but though for some time laid aside by the Earl's means, he was in 1534 again made Lord Deputy. He took Manooth from Kildare's son, who had rebelled, and at length forcing him to submit, sent him to England, where he was executed. He died in his post of Lord Deputy, in December 1535, and was buried at Kilmainham in Ireland."* Another famous member of the

* Kimber's "Respectable Pedigrees of the Baronets of Great Britain."

family was Thomas Skeffington, High Sheriff of Leicestershire at the time of the invasion by the Spanish Armada. He summoned together "all persons between the ages of 18 and 50 years (to the number of 12,530) able to bear arms; 2000 of the prime of which were sent to Tilbury Camp, the rest were sent home furnished with various missive weapons, and directed to rendezvous on the first news of the Spaniards setting foot on English ground." *

The family continued in a direct line until 1613, when the last male heir, John Skeffington, was murdered. The murder—or rather unprovoked combat in which he was slain, and in which he also killed his antagonist—took place in London, and is thus described by Mr. Firth in his "Highways and Byways of Leicestershire."

"Sir William Skeffington had died without issue in 1605, leaving a beautiful widow of whom he had been inordinately jealous, a brother and four sisters. The widow married her groom, Michael Bray, and subsequent quarrels in the family led to a Chancery suit. The parties met for the hearing of the case in the courts at Westminster Hall, when a settlement was suggested and an adjournment made to the Hoop Tavern, in Gray's Inn Lane. There Bray drew his sword upon John Skeffington, as the latter was coming downstairs and ran him through the body. Skeffington had just time to draw his own weapon and make a thrust, and both fell dead together."

Those who like ghost stories may be interested to hear that in one of the oldest parts of Skeffington Hall, on the top floor, a group of rooms is said to be haunted—possibly by John Skeffington or Michael Bray. One of the rooms was formerly a bedroom, but the occupants of the room on various occasions having complained of a sensation as though someone was leaning over the bed, and a feeling of fear and horror, it has for many years been used as a box-room, and the small rooms adjoining it have also been left unoccupied.

In the second volume of his History of Leicestershire Throsby makes the curious mistake of saying that John Skeffington was killed by his father-in-law, although he prints the family pedigree in full, where the relationship is perfectly clear. The last of the Skeffingtons was buried in the family chapel, but no mention is made of the burial place of his brother-in-law, formerly a groom at the Hall, Michael Bray. Anthony Cade, the Rector of Billesdon, composed an epitaph in Latin upon the death of Skeffington, the last five lines of which form the anagram which has often been printed; Throsby gives a translation, made by a friend of his, which is not so well known:

* Throsby.

On the untimely death of a most illustrious
Youth, M. John Skeffington, Esq.;
With whom died the last and only Hope
Of the name of Skeffington of Skeffington,
Who was most unhumanly murdered
On the fourth day of November, in the
Year of our Lord, 1613.
The noble name of Skeffington is gone from
Earth: once the renowned Cherisher of Honour:
Once the fairest gem of his Country:
The sweetest gem and the noble support of Britain,
A name of Honour and Britain's irreparable jewel.
(Written by Anthony Cade, deep in sorrow.)

The repetition in the last five lines was necessary to form the anagram, but, as Throsby remarks, "This sort of verse was called *Decurrent*, from its additional declined reading. These, and many more of the same kind, were much in use and admiration in the time of James I."

Another branch of the family lived at Skeffington Hall during the period of the Commonwealth and up to the latter part of the eighteenth century. The family was divided in the Civil War, Skeffingtons being on both sides; but they received a pardon from Charles II for all "Breaches of truth great and small, treasons, rebellions, insurrections, seditions, commotions, conspiracies, and misprisions . . . also their homicides, felonies, and other offences committed by them."

Skeffington village was one of the villages in Leicestershire ravaged by the plague in 1645, when, according to Nichol's History, the inhabitants left the village and made their homes for a time in the surrounding woods. Part of the village is said to have disappeared soon afterwards, having been permanently abandoned.

About the year 1765, the estate passed by marriage to William Charles Farrell, late Captain in the King's Regiment of Foot Guards, and Lieutenant-Colonel in the army, and one of the Esquires to his Royal Highness Prince Frederick, Duke of York. He took the surname of Skeffington and the arms by the King's Warrant, dated 12th June, 1772, and was created a Baronet in 1786. Meanwhile, in 1778, Mary Skeffington had married John Tailby, and it was this marriage which led William Ward Tailby, the first Master of the Billesdon Hunt, to acquire Skeffington Hall nearly a century afterwards. On account of the relationship he had always wished to make the Hall his family seat, and this may have been one of the reasons that prompted him to take over the country.

After the Farrells came into possession, the fortunes of the family declined,

mainly through the extravagance of the new Baronet, and unfortunately the greatest treasures of Skeffington Hall were sold. A collection of pictures, including works by Rembrandt, Vandyke, Holbein, and Kneller, was lost, not only to the estate, but to the country; little, indeed, was left to the family, but the title, which became extinct with the death of Sir William's son, Sir Lumley St. George Skeffington, who cared little for country life, but was a well-known figure in theatrical circles in London, and one of the notorious Beaux of the time.

The Skeffington estate was for centuries famous for its timber. Skeffington and Loddington Woods supplied much timber for the use of the British Navy, and it is said that the drawing-room of the Hall was floored and wainscoted with the wood from a single oak tree, though the statement made in many of the county histories that none of the floor-boards have a join in them is not correct; the room measures thirty-five feet by twenty-one, and several of the boards, which run lengthways, have been joined. In many of the upper rooms fine old panelling has recently been revealed beneath a thick coating of paint. The Hall itself is Tudor, with portions, notably on the southern side, dating back to the thirteenth century, and earlier. The church of St. Thomas à Becket is Norman and Early English, the chancel arch being a very fine example of Norman architecture. The church was restored shortly before Mr. Tailby purchased the estate, and the chancel rebuilt at the expense of Sir Richard Sutton.*

Throsby gives a rather quaint description of the grounds, obviously written with a view to flattering their owner at the time, the spendthrift Sir William:

"The present possessor of this venerable residence of his ancestors has made some very considerable additions and alterations, both with respect to the mansion, and the grounds about it. In the latter, judgment and taste are conspicuous to a common observer: old buildings, which were offensive to the eye have been removed, and fence walls near the dwelling taken down; and in their place we now behold verdure and trees of ornament, seemingly governed, in their growth, by the guidance of improved nature. The views, seen in the walks near this dwelling, are various and extensive; but they want the aid of water, to enrich them. With your naked eye you may see over a fertile vale the field of Naseby, memorable for the overthrow of Charles the First's army. The beautiful churches of Norton and Gaulby, in some points of view, are pretty objects; as are also Quenby Hall, Billesdon Coppice,† and Skeffington and Loddington Woods."

* Mr. (afterwards Sir) Richard Sutton.

† An old name for the Coplow.

The field of Naseby is nearly sixteen miles away, beyond the Marston and Hothorpe Hills, though Naseby Church spire can just be made out on a clear day; but the nearer southern view over the Rolleston and Noseley Woods, Stonton Wyville and the Langtons, towards Harborough, is as fine a panorama of his country as a Master of hounds could wish to see. Many a time must Squire Tailby have looked out on a hunting morning over the dark

SKEFFINGTON HALL.

folds of his woodlands, extending eastward from Noseley towards Horninghold and the great woods of Stockerston, while close at hand were the once celebrated timbers of the old Skeffington estate, and away to the north-east the remnants of Leighfield Forest round Tilton and Launde. It was a great country to hunt, combining the famous grass-lands of the Quorn with the finest woodlands of High Leicestershire.

The Tailby family came into the country from Lincolnshire about the middle of the seventeenth century, and settled at Slawston. A marriage is recorded in the Parish Register between William Tailby and Joan Hodgkin, both of Slawston, on May 27th, 1668; and two marriages, one between William Inchley and Jane Tailby, the other between George Tailby and Jane Newbie, are recorded in the summer of 1689, the name of Tailby thereafter occurring

frequently in the register up to the end of the eighteenth century. When the common land of Slawston was enclosed in 1793, a former William Ward Tailby is mentioned as one of the principal proprietors.

The future Master of the Billesdon Hunt was born at Humberstone in the County of Leicester on January 18th, 1825, being the only son of William Tailby of Humberstone. He went to Oxford, where he took his degree, studied for the law, and in due course was called to the Bar, but never practised. He married in 1850, Mary, daughter of William Taylor of Humberstone Lodge, and was made High Sheriff of the County in 1856. As a Deputy-Lieutenant for Leicestershire and a J.P. he took an active part in county affairs. When he purchased Skeffington Hall in 1860, Mr. Tailby had nothing but his duties in the county and his interests in agriculture to take him from the sport to which he devoted the rest of his life. The record of that sport he has left in five closely written volumes, which comprise the most complete hunting journal ever kept by a Master of Hounds, and cover not only the whole period of his own Mastership, but the ten years of Sir Bache Cunard's and more than twenty years of Mr. Fernie's. The later entries are brief, but Mr. Tailby scrupulously kept his journal from 1856 until four years before his death on January 5th, 1914, within a fortnight of entering his ninetieth year.

Before turning to the pages of his journal, a sketch must be given of Squire Tailby himself. Known as "Little Tailby," he generally rode horses well up to fourteen stone in spite of his very light weight. He was always a very hard rider and possessed of an iron nerve; the shortness of his stature, however, was a disability that contributed to his extraordinary number of bad falls —he is said to have broken every bone in his body—and on account of it he was often obliged to hold on to the cantle of the saddle when taking a big fence in order to retain his seat. As a result of this he was not able to get clear easily if his horse fell, a cause of his accidents which has been commented upon by many writers,* but which in no way detracted from his brilliant performance as a horseman. He was essentially a riding man, and the more falls he had, the less he seemed to trouble about them. When over seventy he was thrown at a gate, his horse rearing up and falling back on him, breaking his thigh, and, nobody being about, he lay for several hours until he was discovered. But even this did not stop him, and he rode until a short time before his death at eighty-nine.

* Notably Cuthbert Bradley, quoting Frank Gillard.

A BOUNDARY FENCE

In the issue of *Horse and Hound* for January 17th, 1914, there is an eloquent tribute to Mr. Tailby's hard riding during the last thirty years of his life :

" Mr. Tailby continued to ride regularly with Sir Bache Cunard's hounds, and was often out with the Cottesmore. He had ninety days' sport in 1882–3 ; 105 in the following season ; and 115 in 1884–5. In the next season he had three bad falls, and on the last day of hunting had the worst smash of all, breaking three ribs. ' At this moment,' he wrote in his journal, ' I feel I am getting too old to break bones, and think seriously of giving the game up. I have not had much remission for thirty years, when I first took hounds.' This was written in 1886, yet twenty years later this fine veteran was still riding to hounds ! In 1886–7 he only got out on eighty-eight days, ' the shortest number for many years, and all owing to the weather,' and in the following year he saw Sir Bache Cunard succeeded in the Mastership by Mr. C. W. B. Fernie, in whose prospects of success he firmly believed from the first. In 1890–91 he broke his collar-bone, through his horse putting a foot in a drain, but thanks to his iron constitution was all right again by the end of the season. Bad luck, however, still attended this indomitable fox-hunter, as there was a chapter of accidents for him towards the close of the season. ' Three bad falls,' he wrote in his ' Hunting Journal ' at the end of the season, ' will, I fear, conclude my hunting career. A dislocated shoulder and broken leg are not much encouragement at sixty-seven ! ' Yet in the following September he was at it again under ' the shaky auspices of a half-mended broken leg,' and he enjoyed some good sport during that season. He got through 1893–4 without a serious fall, but the succeeding year was an unlucky one, as on March 30th, 1895, he wrote : ' This has been to me the shortest season during my hunting career. On December 31st, 1894, a young mare reared with me at a gate, fell back, and broke my thigh, for which I was confined to my bed on my back for twelve weeks, and how many more I shall be condemned to inactivity or crutches no one can tell. I had had one bad fall before, and put out my shoulder, so that it has been an unlucky season for me, and will, I fear, be my last."

The chapter of accidents was not ended, however, nor was this his last season by many years. In 1897–8 he had a bad fall, " the horse Leap-Year striking me in the face and collar-bone. I am afraid it will be my last attempt to ride to hounds." But, as the pages of the journal will show, he witnessed sport with Mr. Fernie's hounds almost to the end of his life.

Some words written by Mr. W. H. Thornton on the art of falling are curiously appropriate to Mr. Tailby's last decade, with the name changed :

"You should kick your feet out of the stirrups and fall clear of your horse, and then falls do not much matter until you are seventy. After that age, it is as well to be careful, although my old friend, Mr. *Tailby*, at eighty, still refuses to turn his head, and tumbles about over big fences with a smile of contentment on his face."

It must, however, be remembered that these bad falls were the occasional accidents during sixty years' riding to hounds, and that most of them occurred when Mr. Tailby was past his prime. At the zenith of his hunting fame he was as remarkable for the number of great runs that he saw to a finish, and the wonderful way in which he handled his horses, as he was for his hard riding.

CHAPTER III

TAILBY'S HUNTING JOURNAL, 1856–64

"Commenced my career as a Master of Hounds today with a bye-day at Peatling."—W. W. TAILBY.

THE five volumes of the "Hunting Journal" comprise respectively the years 1856–64, 1864–72, 1872–85, 1885–1900, and 1901–10. The volumes are bound in cloth (grey or blue-green) with dark green leather backs and corners; the title "Hunting Journal" and the period covered by each volume is stamped in gilt on a dull red back-label; the size of the page is $6\frac{1}{2}$ by $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and each volume is about 2 inches in thickness. The pages are closely written in a fairly legible hand, the lines being regular, and the entries clearly arranged with the place of the fixture for each day underlined. The dates are written in a narrow margin on the left of each page, where also are crosses and circles referring respectively to a kill or fox gone to ground. On the left hand pages are notes and comments, this system being evolved after the first few entries which are written on both sides of the page. At the end of each season the number of days' cub-hunting and regular hunting is tabulated, with the number of foxes killed and run to ground.*

The journal has never been printed except for a number of extracts quoted by Mr. Costobadie in his book, which is a rather miscellaneous collection of data and anecdotes, entitled the "Annals of the Billesdon Hunt." It does not seem likely that the entire journal will ever be printed, owing to its length and the fact that it would have little interest for the general reader, as it is confined entirely to a record of runs. There are, however, scattered through its pages references to many hunting personalities and incidents of the chase. To select these and quote them apart from the context would be a task insufficiently rewarded by its results, which would be a collection of detached

* A facsimile page of Tailby's Journal for March, 1891, is reproduced on page 61, and facsimiles of the two last entries are given on pages 128 and 129.

sentences and fragmentary jottings; to attempt a summarised record of each season would destroy the character of the diary. The better plan seems to be the selection, almost at random, of pages or single entries as anyone might read them who was able to glance through the diary for an hour or two, with only such comment as an occasional incident requires. The notes mentioned are given as part of the entry to which they refer.

The journal commences with the record, from which quotation has been made at the head of this chapter, of a bye-day a week before the first advertised meet:

Nov. 17th, 1856.—Commenced my career as a Master of Hounds to-day with a bye-day at Peatling. Servants—Tom Day, huntsman—Boxall, 1st whip—Tomlin, 2nd whip. Field small—rode Stargazer. Found at Peatling Gorse, hounds ran him in covert, but the fox would not break and after rattling him almost for half-an-hour they killed him at the edge of the covert. Gave the brush to old Smith's wife, the owner of the covert, as being the only lady out. Trotted off to Jane Ball, which we drew blank, as also John Ball, much to my chagrin. Went on to Walton Holt, where we found two or three foxes, got away with one, but not on very good terms, running as far as Walton village, where he turned to the right by Knaptoft, and ran up to Jane Ball, after which we could make no more out of him. Went home better satisfied with our first performance than I expected.

Nov. 24th—Holt. First day of advertising and so my first public appearance—small field, stormy day, threatening rain. Found 3 or 4 foxes at Holt Wood, ran up to Easton Park, round that quarter several times. Could not make the foxes leave the covert far, till at last one broke by the Holt and we ran him to a farmyard at Medbourn where we lost him. Found again at Stockerston Wood, ran through Merivale Hole,* down to the brook, as if for Stoke End, turned back by Walker's house and ran into the wood again. The hounds ran prettily but the fox was too far before us, and as it was getting late we went home.

Dec. 8th—Holt. Small field—rode Caribou and Stargazer. Drew Holt Wood blank. Found at the young plantation, going for Easton Park, ran through Easton Park, turned for Blaston, back by Holt towards Medbourne. People holloa'd in all directions and got the hounds' heads up, so we left him. Found 2nd fox at Stockerston Wood, ran to the Bolt Wood and back, then away for Allexton Wood, through it, leaving the village on the right, along

* Originally Mirable Hole—now Merivale Holt.

March 9. *Lubenham* - Found at Papillon - ran thro' Marston wood to ground - bolted him - ran to Marston wood again along the Hothorpe Hills, by Theddingworth & Glovers Farm. by Bosworth Gorse, left Walton Holt on the left by Knaptoft up to Walton thorns - slow -

14th. *Stanton Wyville*. Met here to-day as we couldn't hunt on Thursday - Found in Sheepthorns, ran by Carlton & Ilston to Shangton Holt, thro' Noseley wood. by Rolleston. left Illston on right. by Carlton on right. to Shangton village, over Shangton moor up to Langton Caudle over Welham Lodge Farm on left. by Cranoe. Hallaton Manor on left. Slawston Gorse on right. by Medbourne to Holt, a fresh fox jumped up at the Hirne, ran over Railway, across Medbourne Road almost to Weston, over Kendall's Farm, over river, by Welham Lodge up to Langton Caudle, where I left after running slowly 3½ hrs! good day -

16. Saddington - Found at John Ball - ran by Gumley - Fleckney - Bruntingthorpe -

✗ Peatling & killed - Found at Mowsley Gorse - ran to Knaptoft, back to Walton Holt thorns - Chopped a fox at

✗ Laughton Hills - Gumley - Blank -

17th. Kilworth - Ran from Cranford to Xamnah Found at Tailor's Coppice. broke my Collar Bone in a drain & fence (!!)

the valley, leaving Vowe's Gorse on the left, through Keythorpe plantings, leaving Ram's Head on the left, across the turnpike for Loddington Reddish, through it and up to Launde Wood, where we got on a fresh fox and so stopped them. Think we changed foxes at Keythorpe as our fox was seen quite beat —fine day's sport, wanted a kill.

Dec. 15th Kilby Bridge. Rode Stargazer, drew Peatling Gorse blank, drew Wistow blank, large field out. Going from Newton Harcourt to Glenn a

GREAT PEATLING COVERT.

fox jumped up in a stubble field, ran towards Glenn and we pressed him very quick, he turned and ran into a pond, it was rather full of water and the fox was drowned. Found a 2nd fox at Glenn Gorse, went away for Hobson's house at Stretton, turned to the left as if for Stoughton, tried to get back to the covert, was headed back over French's farm at Oadby and made for Stoughton again, when hares kept getting up in all directions and spoiling the scent. Crossed the Stoughton and Stretton road by Hale's Lodge, as if he was going to Norton Gorse, ran him almost to Stoughton, when he was so far before us we gave it up. The confounded hares spoilt our sport.

Dec. 18th—Rolleston. Large field from Leicester, Melton and Harboro' —rode Caribou and Chieftain. Found at Rolleston Gorse, ran through Noseley Wood, through Shangton Holt, out at the top, pointing for Illston. Left it on the left, by New Inn Spinney, across the road as if for Skeffington, bearing to the right for Rolleston Gorse again, several foxes on foot, ours went to ground in a field by the Skeffington road. Field very wild, did not give hounds a chance, or we should have killed our fox before he got to the drain. Time 40 minutes.

Dec. 26th—Keythorpe. Day after Xmas day—very hard frost, thought there would be no hunting, but as I had come all the way from London to hunt, thought I would try. Met at 12—found it would do, rode Chieftain. Found at Vowe's Gorse, no scent, ran slowly up to Loddington Reddish and lost him. Went to Keythorpe Wood, found a fox had gone away before we got there—ran his line slowly up to Glooston Wood, where we got on better terms with him, the scent quite changed for the better. Got away quickly from Glooston Wood, left Hallaton Wood on the left, over Hallaton Bottoms as if going for Vowe's Gorse, pace very quick. He got headed on the hill, turned back over Hallaton Bottoms again, across the Hallaton and Goadby road, pointing for Hallaton, turned to the right for Vowe's Gorse where we had the first check after 25 minutes : rattling pace (alone with the hounds up to this time and very well carried), hit the scent off on the road, across Vowe's Great Close, over Dexter's farm, across the Blaston road by Busby's Spinney up to within a field of Holt Wood, when as it was nearly dark we had to stop the hounds, though they richly deserved their fox, after the best run I have seen this season of one hour and 30 minutes. The company much pleased, though I think it was only distance that lent enchantment to their view. Roughly speaking I was never better carried, and saw the whole of it.

This run was the last in 1856, a hard frost stopping hunting until New Year's Day. After a meet at Blaston on January 1st, 1857, there was a run of one hour and thirty-five minutes from Stockerston Wood to Gibbet Gorse, by Ayston and Martinsthorpe ; the river Chater was twice crossed during this run, the entry closing, " Caribou carried me well though he slipped back with me into the brook and I got a ducking." The year opened with frost and snow, and there were no runs of any length, though hunting was continued. The next big day was in February :

Feb. 19th, 1857—Allexton. Rode Chieftain. Found in Allexton Wood

ran quickly through Wardley Wood, out at the top over the turnpike, down the hill, up to Quaker's Lodge as if for Launde, headed to the left, down to Allexton and left the Hall on the right, going away best pace for Vowe's Gorse. Straight through it, left Ram's Head on the right, over the hill between Hallaton and Keythorpe, over Hallaton Bottoms, up the hill leaving Hallaton on the left and Vowe's Gorse on the right, into the March Meadow, where we could make no more out of it. Time up to this point 1 hour and 15 minutes, going

"DISTANCE LENT ENCHANTMENT TO THEIR VIEW."

best pace all the time and making a capital run, if we had but killed him. Chieftain carried me exceedingly well. Went off to Holt for a 2nd fox—found in Holt Wood, and he went to ground in the rabbit warren—another was holloaed away at the same time. Got on to his line, ran him through Stockerston Wood, through Allexton Wood, up to Wardley Wood, back to Allexton Wood, where he lay down in a hedgerow—we overshot him. He got his wind and he got back to Allexton, from there again to Wardley Wood, where there were 2 or 3 fresh foxes afoot, and we had to stop the hounds, our horses being almost dead beat. Sadly disappointed not to kill him after running 2 hours and 15 minutes. Hounds did not get back till 8 o'clock when Boxall's horse died, having burst a blood vessel. The hardest day we've had.

*March 23rd—12th Milestone on the Welford Road.** Rode Stargazer—drew Walton Holt, Bosworth, Laughton Hills, Gumley, Jane and John Ball blank—found a fox at Peatling Spinneys in a fearful snow-storm. Could not run a yard. Drew Peatling Gorse blank—the ground being by this time 3 inches deep in snow we were obliged to go home, having only just escaped a blank day in this uncertain country. Went home intensely mortified.

April 8th—Holt. Rode Caribou and Chieftain. Gave a *third last* day to please the people, ground awfully deep—found a fox at Holt Wood, ran through Merivale Hole almost to Great Easton and lost him. Found a second fox at Allexton Wood, ran through Wardley, over the Uppingham turnpike by the Quaker's Lodge, turned before reaching Ridlington and lost him in a plantation full of holes where we expect he got to ground. Found a third fox at Vowe's Gorse, went away a good pace over the turnpike, over Loddington Brook, through Launde Wood, by Cole's Lodge, through Cheselden's Coppice, and up to Prior's Coppice, where there were 2 or 3 foxes on foot, one of which the hounds took towards Preston, but I thought it was a fresh one, had 'em stopped and got on to another which ran through Brown's Coppice, up to Owston Wood, where the horses were so beat that we stopped the hounds at 5 o'clock, after the hardest day of the season. The ground was awfully deep—Sir Harry, ridden by Boxall, was so tired he had to be left at Launde Abbey all night and the hounds did not reach the kennels at Oadby till 9 o'clock.

The mention of kennels at Oadby is interesting; apparently the new kennels which Cecil states were constructed at Billesdon—Lord Suffield's kennels being used as cottages—were not ready. Out of thirty-five days' hunting only seven entries record kills, two foxes being killed in one day; this is duly lamented by Tailby, but it is clear he had a good deal of trouble with his field. He gives an example in his final comments: "The quickest run we had was from Vowe's Gorse to Somerby in 44 minutes, when we lost our fox completely by the holloaing and shouting of the field, getting the hounds' heads up, whilst the fox lay down, crawled back behind them and died, having been found dead by Tom Heycock the next day within two fields of where we lost him."

The following season cub-hunting commenced on August 26th chiefly in the woods round Launde and Stockerston, though Wistow, the Peatlings and Glenn Gorse were once drawn. Nine cubs were killed during nineteen

* A famous fixture in the Fernie Monday country, not used so much in recent years.

days hunting. Regular hunting commenced on November 3rd with a meet at Stockerston Wood. Many coverts were drawn blank at the beginning of the season, and a thick fog interfered with sport on several days; fortune smiled, however, at the end of the month:

Nov. 28th—Cole's Lodge. Found a brace of foxes at Prior's Coppice, one of which took the line for Owston Wood, ran the other about 10 minutes in covert when he crossed the lane at the top, made for Lax Hill.* Over the brook (only 4 of us got over) by Manton Station. Through Weston Lodge, by Lynton down to the railway by Pilton village, recrossed the railway, raced him in the direction of Morcott and ran into him in the open between Morcott and Luffenham after as good a 45 minutes as ever I wish to see—so good was it that everyone was willing to go home though it was only 1 o'clock—capital day ! ! ! !

Dec. 4th—Thurnby. Found at Glenn Gorse, ran by King's house, bore to the left, down to the brook, along the brook-side over the Stretton road, leaving Stretton village on the right, still along the brook-side in the direction of Houghton. Bore to the left as if for Scraptoft, up to which point it was a very good 26 minutes—first rate—at that time there was a holloa to a fox that had jumped up in the middle of a field which Goddard unfortunately went to (our fox being gone on to Billesdon Coplow), which took us by Hall's Lodge almost up to Glenn Gorse again, where we lost him—losing by the confounded holloa most likely a first-rate run.

Dec. 19th—Blaston Pasture. . . . Found our second fox at Merivale Hole, ran like lightning across Easton Park through Hill Wood, over the hill through Drayton. Over the river and railway as hard as they could run leaving Cottingham on our left, and up to Carlton Spinney, where a shepherd dog chased him and caused us to lose him, though we got on to Carlton Park; up to the Spinney from Merivale Hole was 28 minutes of, I think, the fastest running I ever saw in my life, the fox only just before hounds all the time, as I saw him. Extremely provoking it was not to kill him. This is the best day's sport I have seen this year, and had we killed would have been perfect. The fox got on to Carlton Park and over the river to Pipewell Wood ! ! ! ! ! !

The exclamation marks seem to have affected Mr. Tailby's pen, the next few entries being written in a thin, scratchy hand, and very brief. Goddard is first mentioned as huntsman in the entry for December 4th. The remainder

* This name is illegible, but, the line being over the River Gwash and the railway near Manton Station, Lax Hill is the nearest point.

of the season saw some good runs, with four kills in the middle of March, two after a meet at the 12th Milestone, showing an improvement in that part of the country. Two more kills in April completed a total of twenty-nine foxes killed for the season during seventy days' hunting, including cub-hunting.

The season 1858–59 commenced early in September, cub-hunting being carried on over a wider area than in the previous season, several cubs being accounted for in the present Monday country, and round Glenn and the Strettons; fifteen were killed in twenty-one days' hunting. Once the regular

LANGTON CAUDLE, FROM THE ROAD NEAR CROXFIELD SPINNEY.

season started the total of kills mounted rapidly. A good day occurred round Ranksborough, in the present Cottesmore Saturday country, after a meet at Knossington; but one of the best runs was the last for the year:

Dec. 30th, 1858—Rolleston Hall. Found at Rolleston Gorse, ran over the brook, across Skeffington by Tugby Bushes, and the scent being bad we did nothing further, thinking he had gone on to Loddington Reddish. Not wishing to be in the woodlands, we went back to Noseley and drew it blank —found a fox at Stonton Wood, he tried to make his point 3 different times and as often was he headed by the wild, anxious-to-override field. At last he got away on the Glooston side, over the Gartree Road, over the brook,

through Dent's Spinney, headed back, leaving Glooston on the left, and up to Glooston Wood—scent very middling—rattled him in the wood, got headed again 2 or 3 times, at last he got away for Fallow Closes, ran him once round it, and he broke out by Dent's Spinney, recrossed the bottom by Robins's house, crossed the Cranoe and Slawston road, over Grange's farm almost to Cranoe, turned to the left as if for the Caudles—scent good—pressed him too hotly, headed to the left, over B. Ward's farm, across the Welham road, and up to the cross-roads between Slawston and Weston, where he tried the drain. Hounds stopped after the most brilliant 35 minutes I ever saw from Fallow Closes. Tried to get him out, but he had gone on, only trying the drain. F. Sutton, Goddard, W.W.T., and Redfern alone saw it !

Jan. 13th, 1859—*Stonton Wyville*. Drew Langton Caudles blank—as we went away a fox was viewed coming up the hill from Thorpe Langton—got on to him, ran over J. Ward's farm and turned to the right over the Slawston and Welham roads, bore to the left up to the river, turned across the Weston road up to Medbourne, left the village and up to Holt, across the Great Easton road and up to the railway and river, where we lost him. Found 2nd fox at Dent's Spinney, ran very quick over Blaston Pasture, bore to the left by Holt Hall as if for Great Easton, almost up to Holt Wood—had a check there, thought he had gone to Holt Wood—hit it off to the right across the Great Easton road, almost up to Great Easton, left the village on the right, Stoke Dry on the left, across the road up to Lyddington, bore across the valley, leaving the village on the right—country very very strong, I was alone with hounds and had everything to myself, had 3 or 4 fences to jump over the Lyddington road. Up the hill over two awful bottoms, up to Bisbrook Gorse where we got on to a fresh fox. Horses all beat. I rode Legerdemain, never better carried. The best run I ever saw—time from Holt to Bisbrook Gorse 30 minutes.

Feb. 1st—Withcote Hall. Waited half-an-hour for the Duke of Cambridge who turned up at last—was introduced to him. Found 5 or 6 foxes in Owston Wood ran one as if going for the Tilton quarries, headed into Launde Little Wood, back over the Castle Hill. Back again to Launde Park Wood where he got into a drain under the ride, poked him out with a long pole, ran him out of the wood and killed him. 2nd fox at Loddington Reddish, ran through Tugby Wood, Brown's Wood, and Tilton wood, up to Launde Park Wood 2 or 3 times. He tried to get away for Loddington again, but we ran into him. Good day, very satisfactory for hounds—fast run, 1 hour, 15 minutes—horses had enough.

THE VALLEY OF THE STONTON BROOK

Stonton Wood on the left, Crossburrow Hill (Dent's Spinney) on the right

Feb. 17th—Gumley. Drew Gumley, Laughton Hills, Bisbrook Gorse, John Ball, Wistow all blank, much to my disgust—determined not to draw that country again this season—foxes supposed to be *poisoned ! !*

The suspicion that foxes were being destroyed was confirmed by the discovery of a fox with a wire round its neck on the Laughton Hills the next season : " A confirmation of my previous opinion of the bad feeling towards hunting in the neighbourhood of the Laughton Hills and Bosworth Gorse," writes Tailby. The season ended with a total of ninety-one days' hunting and forty-six foxes killed. Two long runs must be given from the record of the season 1859–60, which ended with almost the same figures, eighty-nine days' hunting and forty-two foxes killed. The first of the runs is the longest yet recorded :

Nov. 22nd, 1859—Leigh Lodge. Quite a red-letter day. Found at Manton Gorse, the fox went away over the vale, and about 10 minutes after ran across Martinsthorpe Park, through the spinney at the bottom of the park, bore to the left over the brook, along the brook-side at a good pace up to the Preston road, crossed it and ran to within a field of Prior's Coppice, where the fox was chased by a shepherd dog, and checked for 5 minutes ; hit him off again through Prior's Coppice, ran him twice round it, and he went away like a shot out at the bottom, up to Cheselden's Coppice. Here he was headed and bore to the right by the lodge at the bottom and up to Braunston, leaving the village on the right—very fast they ran—across the road and up to Orton Park Wood. He disdained the covert, leaving it on his left, also leaving the line of plantations on his left, he crossed the Oakham and Knossington road and ran almost to Ranksboro'—found that too hot for him, so he left the covert on his left and ran up to the Langham road. Up to this time we had run 1 hour and 13 minutes, best pace, too good for most, and very few saw it at all—I think I may say not more than 2 saw the whole of it : there was a delay of a minute in the Langham road, but they soon hit it off again and ran up to Ashwell, here we had a check of 10 minutes, but Goddard persevered, held him on for Burley plantations (everybody had gone home except residents in the neighbourhood), hit line off in the plantations, got a holloa across the Oakham and Cottesmore road, ran into Burley Wood, skirted the outside of it, down the avenue, through the osier bed, across the Oakham road, when I could see the fox was beat, by his going up and down 2 or 3 hedgerows. Ran him at a good pace almost to Egleton, and ran into him on the railway close to the Egleton crossing, after the best day I have ever seen of 3 hours

15 minutes. He was a fine old dog fox and we kept his brush as a memorial of so good and satisfactory a run. All the hounds up but one, and we had 6 couples of puppies out—it was the bitch pack, and very well they did it: Stargazer carried me most brilliantly.

Jan. 12th, 1860—Keythorpe Hall. Drew Ram's Head blank, and as we were drawing the adjoining spinneys, a fox was viewed going over Moor Hill. Goddard galloped on to him and got the hounds laid on, he went to Hallaton Bottoms by Hallaton Wood, leaving it on the right, by Keythorpe Wood and

"AND VERY FEW SAW IT."

up the Hill to Goadby at a tremendous pace. A few minutes were lost here as there were two foxes, anyhow we settled to one and went straight as a die for Rolleston Wood, through it, leaving Noseley Lodge on the left and the Clump on the right, for New Inn, straight through and on for Illston Long Spinney, down the hill and straight up for Gaulby. Here he was viewed, ran straight through Norton Gorse—did not dwell there 2 minutes—down to the Norton Brook, alongside of which he ran for about a mile, crossed it and bore up for Houghton, left the village 2 fields on the right and up to Thurnby, which we left one field on the right; then ran along the brook-side as if Scraptoft was his point. He, however, did not know where he was and

bore to the left for Evington, ran up by Houghton Lodge and on to Evington Church, and then bore to the left right into all the Stoughton hares, which caused us to lose as gallant a fox as ever I saw run. I never saw a finer run in my life—the point being 14 miles as the crow flies we must have run 17 or 18 miles in 1 hour and 45 minutes.

On January 31st Tailby laments the death of a favourite hunter after a hard day round Braunston and Loddington : " I regret to say poor Gamester that I rode this day died after it from inflammation—and the only one I have that never gave me a fall ! " Wire is mentioned in the Tilton country, " hounds not being able to get over or through the wire fences without trouble," and in this country also an unfortunate incident occurred just before the season ended : " We had the bad luck to have 4 couples of hounds poisoned whilst out hunting to-day—Challenger and Ajax died directly they got to the kennels, the others after strong emetics got better. They were supposed to be poisoned by strychnine picked up in rabbits in Tilton Wood."

In the *résumé* at the end, this season is described as " unprecedented almost in its amount of sport in our country, a very old sportsman having remarked to me the other day that he had not seen so good a season since 1830, when Lord Southampton hunted the Quorn country."

The season 1860–61 started well, but there is a hint of more destruction of foxes in the sentence, " went to Wistow where 21 foxes had been seen by the keeper—did not find one—drew my own conclusions as to the integrity of the keeper ! " Twenty-two foxes were killed during cub-hunting this year, making a total of sixty-seven killed out of eighty-six days' hunting. In one day (January 28th, 1861) three foxes were killed after three runs, two lasting about an hour and one two hours seventeen minutes. Tailby's *résumé* is better worth quotation here than his records of runs :

" And thus terminates our season 1860–61—the best I remember. Last season was good, but this far surpassed it ; the scent, up to the frost which came on the 20th. Dec. and lasted 5 weeks, was wonderfully good. The ground always wet and generally so deep as to be very distressing to horses. Up to this time we had had only one bad day at all, and that not so very bad. Amongst our best days the fastest were Dec. 8th, from Wardley Wood to Brook Hill in 30 minutes, we ran a 7 mile point ; Nov. 28th, a capital 1 hour and 25 minutes from Keythorpe to Gaulby and back by Shangton Holt to Noseley ; Nov. 22nd, a good day to the Laughton Hills from Wistow in

1 hour and 25 minutes; and Nov. 26th, a good 50 minutes, with a kill, from Blaston earths by Hallaton and Horninghold to Medbourne over a very very strong line. After this we were laid up with 5½ weeks frost and when we started again the ground was deeper than ever and the scent I think quite as good. Our best day of the season was Jan. 28th when we met at Gumley (for details of runs see page 71). A very old sportsman who was out declared it was the best day he had seen for 30 years. On Jan. 25th we had a good

HARD WEATHER.

35 minutes with a kill—found in Skeffington High Field, by Illston to within a field of Billesdon Coplow, putting him down handsomely in the enemy's country. Only 4 or 5 bad days the whole season, with these exceptions all the rest were good sporting days, always a gallop and often a kill. Tragedy got kicked one day at Laughton and though she recovered from the blow was good for nothing afterwards. This was almost the only serious casualty we met with—I am well satisfied with my hounds, they have done their work steadily and well and our young entry have done well—Sailor * is the admira-

* One of four hounds, the produce of Oakley Sultan and Sylvia.

tion of all. The stable has also done pretty well, of course we have had a good many raw ones, but only one had to be destroyed, viz., Artillery. Lady Godiva is about done, and I think I shall give her away for a brood mare. Altogether I congratulate myself on having concluded a very successful season, as well as showing good runs, having killed more foxes than have been killed in the same country for many many years, if there were ever so many killed. Our great topic of dispute has been the "Skittles riot," a certain nobleman taking a great objection to that young lady, and wishing me to take the hounds home when she came out, and endeavouring to enforce this wish by saying that it was the general wish of the country gentlemen and that in the event of my not taking the hounds home I should receive a discharge from his and all the others non-rented coverts. I took my stand on the broad principle that the hunting field is open to all the world, that I am not the censor of the morality of the hunting field, that I have no right to disappoint others to gratify the prejudices of an individual, and that in short nothing should induce me to take the hounds home merely because the unfortunate Skittles is out. I am encouraged in this the more that I never hear any complaints of her conduct in the hunting field, or that she is in any way objectionable to the ladies who came out. On this I take my stand, let the result be what it may. I regret extremely the end of the season, but as there is a time for everything, I suppose now we ought to consult other interests than our own, but the ground is in beautiful condition for riding and if the landlords and farmers would let us, and there were no such things as vixens and cubs, we might hunt for another month."

"Skittles" was one of the finest horsewomen of the day, and a regular follower of the Billesdon Hunt for many years after 1861. That very year she distinguished herself by jumping the brook on the National Hunt Steeplechase course at Harborough in cold blood. The course was in Farndon Field, and the first National Hunt Steeplechase was run there in 1860. Another regular follower of the Hunt at this time was Jim Mason—perhaps the finest horseman in England—who won the Grand National on Lottery in 1839. Sir Willoughby Maycock, who with his father often followed Tailby's hounds, gives a graphic picture of "Skittles," quoted by Mr. Costobadie in his book:

"I remember very well one day in the early sixties, riding home from hunting with my father, by the side of Stonton Wood. Suddenly we heard the sound of horses galloping behind us, two people flashed by and were over the fence in front of us in the twinkling of an eye. They were larking

home after a blank day, or something approaching it. One was a man in black, the other a woman. The man had a perfect seat, very upright, tall, thin and as smart as paint. His companion wore a habit that fitted her like a glove, and a bit of cherry ribbon round her neck; in short, she was a perfect dream. I asked my father if he knew who they were. 'Yes,' he replied, 'The man is Jim Mason and the woman is Skittles.'"

Early in the season 1861–62 (a typical day's cub-hunting at Noseley excepted) the only entry of special interest is the one recording the sudden death of Mr. Greene of Rolleston, a great grief to Tailby; later there is a run which he describes as the severest for horses in his experience. Cub-hunting commenced on September 10th:

Sept. 27th 1861—*Noseley Hall.* After a nice rain we met at Noseley to disturb the foxes in their depredations on the poultry—had the bitches out with six couples of puppies. Found immediately at the left-hand side of the drive in the plantations, ran for the Dog-kennels, back by the lodge, out for the plantations on Paynter's farm, through them into the Hardwicks, where 2 or 3 foxes were on foot, rattled them out and broke away for Shangton Holt, in which we found 4 or 5 more foxes, stuck to them for about an hour, broke away again for Paynter's farm, and ran into him in a belt of plantation going for Noseley. Drew more of the Noseley plantations, found again in Noseley Gorse, a bit of gorse by the side of the hill. He could not get away from them and they killed him. Went to draw Pratt's Spinney but did not find. Found again in Noseley Wood, ran very quick up to the Hardwicks, from there to Shangton Holt, and back to the Hardwicks, when I thought the places were so soiled and that we had done enough—so we came home—good day.

Nov. 7th.—Rolleston Hall. Found a fox immediately, he followed the hounds from the wood into the Gorse—I saw him. Got on to him at once, went straight through the gorse up the hill to the left, across Sykes's farm up to Skeffington and Tilton Woods, straight through, over Robin-a-Tiptoe, up to Launde Big Wood. Through Launde Park Wood, out in the middle ride and up the hill, leaving Cole's Lodge and Leigh Lodge on his left; he ran straight up to the Quaker's Lodge at Ridlington after as fine a hunting run of 1 hour 30 minutes as I ever wish to see. I was dreadfully grieved on coming home to find that poor Greene, who had entertained us at his house, had talked cheerfully with us all, and who was apparently in his usual health, had gone home after being out half-an-hour with the hounds and died in his chair in 10 minutes—so uncertain is life!

A MEET OF THE FERNIE AT NOSELEY

Jan. 2nd 1862—*Illston-on-the-Hill.* Drew Burgess's Spinneys blank—found a brace of foxes at Shangton Holt, one of which they chopped, leaving nothing but his blood to tell the tale—the other went away for the Hardwicks, bore to the right by Peatt's house, back to Shangton Holt through it, over the Carlton road, across for Noseley, through Noseley Wood, over Stonton Brook and into Stonton Wood, where he was so far before us we thought it best to try for another, which we did at Glooston Wood and had the run of the season, making up with what we had done before the hardest day's hunting I ever witnessed. Found him in Glooston Wood, ran between Cranoe and Glooston, over the road by Dent's Spinney, bore to the right by Stonton Wood, through Glooston Wood almost to Hallaton Wood, bore to the right by Fallow Closes down to the Hallaton and Goadby road, ran parallel with it, bore to the right getting back almost to Fallow Closes, again leaving it on the right, up to Vowe's House, along the road towards Hallaton, then across Dexter's farm up to the Blaston road, along it up to Slawston Gorse and straight through it down the hill—over the Medbourne road, over Heycock's farm, crossed the Slawston and Welham road, over the dyke and almost to Welham Lodge. Here the fox and hounds were in the same field and we expected to run into him every minute, but as he kept gaining on us although the hounds raced at him he must have been a fresh fox. He ran up the valley between Cranoe and Welham, up to the Slawston road, over it, over the brook and up to Vowe's House, left it on the right and over the Hallaton road, bore to the left over the Rectory Farm (here I had to help a friend from under his horse and lost a great deal of time) across the Hallaton and Norton road, pointed for Horninghold, bore to the left over Fearn Farm, over the Allexton and Keythorpe bridle road, over the turnpike at Finchley Bridge, over the Belton and Loddington road, through Belton Spinneys and up to Launde Park Wood. Here I stopped them running a fresh fox out of Launde Park Wood towards the Abbey at 5 o'clock—quite dark—every horse beaten and no one but Lord Hopetoun to help me. This was the most punishing and most severe run I ever saw—hounds went clean away from everyone—all the horses were beat. Lord Hopetoun and myself had just sufficient power left to stop the hounds. We had been running all day. Never saw horses so beat in my life! Despair had his name changed to "Never Despair" from this day.

Feb. 15—Slawston. Found at Slawston Thorns, ran very quickly by the church up to Fallow Closes, delayed a little, went on by Hallaton Wood to Norton Hill plantation, through Keythorpe Wood and up to Glooston Wood, where he got to ground as they were just killing him. Found again at Langton

Caudle, ran by Church Langton, bore to the right through Sheepthorns up to the Langton road, over it, by Pateman's Lodge, straight by Shangton Holt, where I saw the fox; he ran across the road at top of the covert, left the Hardwicks on the right by Noseley, straight through the plantations by the house, to Goadby, down to the Rolleston Brook and over it up almost to the gorse. Here we had a check, then he bore to the right, and over the brook again to

A HEAVY POULTRY BILL.

Skeffington High Fields, where we gave him up after a very good hour and 10 minutes. This was a capital day and a great triumph as all the Pytchley swells were out, viz., Lords Spencer and Westmorland, Bateman, Whyte Melville, *cum multis aliis ! ! !*

A great season ended—though the number of foxes killed had dropped from the very high total of the previous season to forty-seven during ninety days'

hunting—and everyone admitting the wonderful average of good runs, Tailby has, nevertheless, a complaint to make of his huntsman: Goddard, he considers, is too prone to go to a holloa in his anxiety to kill his fox, rather than let the hounds hunt the scent out. He has a note on the subject against one of the season's entries: "owing to Goddard's extreme perversity in trying to get the hounds to a holloa, when they were running their fox as well as could be and would have run into him in 5 minutes, we took 10 minutes at Ashby, which quite prevented our killing the fox." This run (which was from Launde over the Quorn Friday country) marks the first of the serious differences of opinion in the field between Tailby and Goddard that led to a change of huntsman at the end of the next season. This season, according to Tailby's *résumé*, was an indifferent one, though the total of kills was three more than the last; the weather was open and the scent bad. Goddard left at the end of it, on May 1st, 1863. The season was, however, enlivened by several incidents, such as the swimming of the Welland, "into which Conjuror plunged and swam out safe," during a run from Slawston to Carlton Park; the killing of a fox near the Punch Bowl with four white pads, and later on the same day another with one white pad; and a very large gathering at Gumley with the Duke d'Aumale present. Tailby was absent from one meet as the result of a fall, his first absence for seven years. At the end of the season distemper and lung disease broke out in the kennels and he describes the pack as in "a woeful state." He ends, "thus passes another season—hounds dilapidated, horses dilapidated, and self dilapidated; hope we may all recruit ourselves by another year."

The season 1863–64 was not very remarkable in any way; the weather was capricious and scent bad, but the total of kills reached fifty-six. In spite of this, there was a heavy poultry bill at the end of the season and the country was very full of foxes. Goodall became huntsman early in 1864—Tailby's only comment being "hounds very steady under the new huntsman, who seems much liked." One entry deserves quotation, with which the record of Tailby's first eight seasons must end:

Nov. 5th, 1863.—*Illston-on-the-Hill.* Found at Shangton Holt, ran over the road to Illston, bore to the left up to Gaulby Spinneys, leaving Norton on the right, almost to Stretton, down to Burton Overy, along the brookside, turned to the left over the Harboro' turnpike, was headed and ran down to Glenn village, through it by the chapel, across the turnpike again, almost to Oadby, where a fresh fox jumped up. Then ran nearly to Knighton Spinneys,

leaving them on the right, up to Kilby Bridge, where another fox jumped up, to Arnesby—up to which time we had been running 2 hours and 10 minutes—and here we had to give up after one of the finest runs I ever saw. We must have gone over 16 or 17 miles of country—never run over before, a good deal of it—no gaps and very few gates.

CHAPTER IV

TAILBY'S HUNTING JOURNAL, 1864–72

"None half so fancied as our gallant squire,
When on some trusty steed he leads the way—
Paddy, Despair, Precentor, or 'the Grey.'"

THE ballad from which the above lines are taken appeared in *The Sporting Gazette* of March 9th, 1864. It is very long, and the rhymes in places are so atrocious and the scansion so bad that it is not worth quoting in full; but the best parts of it are spirited and have the additional interest of defining—or rather, indicating—the country hunted on different days. This is very difficult to make out from the diary because the days of the week are not given. After a clumsy opening the ballad continues:

"Turn to the simpler records of the meets,
There, towards the bottom of the list, you'll see
Modestly placed, the fixtures of Tailby.
Yet these are names historically bound
With noblest annals of the horse and hound.
Glen Gorse—on Monday—sure a fox to show,
In contrast to its neighbouring blank, Wistow.
Tuesday—Cole's Lodge, with coppice close at hand,
Encompassed on all sides by fairy land,
Whose sloping pastures our eyes pursue,
Till distant woodlands intercept the view;
But ere their sylvan refuge shall delay
The Billesdon hounds, once settled on their prey,
How many a bullfinch, grim with thorny growth,
Shall test the pluck of horse and horseman both;
How many an oxer, with its silvery rail,
The lessening numbers of the few curtail;
Or winding bottom, with insidious bank,
Spread consternation in the foremost rank,
As some aspirant to the pride of place,
Disdaining foresight, in the headlong race
The hoped-for landing is observed to miss,
And flounders back into the deep abyss.
Whilst some, with hearts as hard, but quicker eye,
Wheel to the right the timbered gap to fly!
Others there are who prudently decline
The ambitious pleasures of the actual line.

The wind these study, versed in every trick,
Apt to develop some consummate ' nick,'
Serene they canter through each bridle gate,
And on the craning of their friends dilate;
Enraptured with themselves, if, on the sly,
They spoil the sport and gain a place thereby.
But the mere mention of Cole's Lodge has led,
With equal mischief, my own muse ahead.
This is but Tuesday's meet. On *Thursday* next,
We must take Keythorpe for our solemn text.
And such a ' lawn meet ' is a solemn thing,
When ' nips ' of cognac laden flunkies bring,
With variations of the cherry juice,
That no less alcoholic warmth induce;
Or, a like medium, with an orange smack,
Of golden colour, though the seal is black,
Primed at the door, how jauntily we move
To draw the Ramshead—when, by Ammon Jove,
No long expectancies the find retard—
Already sounds the note of ' Abelard.'
But I forgot—in future tense I sing,
So need the sport to no conclusion bring.
Pleased to predict the chances ten to one,
From Berner's Coverts, of a brilliant run,
Which, if you doubt, go buy a map and see,
Full of rich promise, their topography;
Tilton, Launde Wood, and Allexton surround,
With scarce one blot of plough the favour'd ground.

. . . . . .

But still I have another meet to note,
O'er which my fancy in soft clouds shall float.
'Tis Wardley's Toll-bar—some dislike the place,
Ayston is near, which don't improve the case;
Not that I really credit what I've heard
Of foxes there, at midnight, deep interred,
Holding the church in far too high respect,
Such impious obsequies to e'en suspect!
What, though its spinneys keep no varmint tod,
The Hall, at least, preserves an ' awkward squad '
Of ' vernal captains,' budding forth to claim
The ' B.H.' buttons—universal fame!
From Bisbrook, then, I'll wait to see 'em cram
Across the valley—up to Rockingham;
But, ere I speed them on the dangerous way,
Two words of friendly caution would convey—
If schooled in Essex, don't suppose you can
At a jog-trot the double oxer span;
Or, though on Bandbox dipping by you go,
And the Grey Plover to the fore will show,
Would you enjoy these pleasures unalloy'd,
O'er rail and brook, the ' voluntary ' avoid.

The season 1864–65 was a bad one. It is summed up by Tailby as follows :

" I suppose I must agree with the general opinion that this has been the worst season, or one of the worst seasons ever known—what with continued frost, deep snow, high winds and hard ground, we could never expect sport, though I must say that I have seen half a dozen runs this season as good as any I ever saw in my life. The foxes have been particularly good and stout, making very good points ; more particularly I may specify the Orton Park, Fallow Closes and Wardley Wood foxes. It has been a trying season for hounds, more than for horses—I never had so few lame horses or so many lame hounds at the end of the season. We have left lots of foxes in the country, enough to have had another fortnight had the weather permitted us, but the temperature at the end of the season—viz., the two first weeks of April—has been something fearful, the thermometer being constantly at 65 in the shade. Hoping we may have a better season next year, I can only say good-bye to diaries and hunting particulars till next cub-hunting. Two misfortunes I must not omit to mention happened to the establishment, viz., Goodall broke his collar-bone and Baily, the 1st whip, had a bad fall over a wire fence which brought on a concussion of the brain."

Sixty foxes were killed in eighty-five days' hunting this season, as against sixty-nine in seventy days' hunting the following season 1865–66, which was the best of Tailby's career up to that time. Cub-hunting started in August, 1865, and twenty-eight foxes were killed before regular hunting commenced on November 6th. From the 14th of this month occurred six good days in succession, but the most notable run took place in February :

Feb. 26th, 1866—Saddington. Found a brace of foxes at Jane Ball. One went away for Shearsby, we followed the other to Knaptoft, pointing for Kilworth Sticks, over the earths at Kilworth Hall, and they ran into him going up for South Kilworth after a very good 50 minutes. Went on to Walton Holt and were told of a fox that had just gone by the covert, got on his line, ran very slowly over the deep ploughs, crossed the turnpike about the 12th Milestone, ran over the bottom straight up for Bosworth Gorse, where there was another fox that got away back to Walton Holt. The hounds stuck to the run fox, got him away after about 10 minutes, ran over the canal and the railway up to Bosworth village, where the fox ran up the street, ran him through some orchards at the back of Bosworth, crossed the Welford road by the toll-gate, over the canal leaving Welford town on the left, straight up to the field before

the Hemplow Hills, into which he disdained to seek shelter : then bore down the hill for the canal—hounds all swam it—then alongside the canal, when he bore to the right and crossed the railway, straight into Stanford Hall Park, almost to Stanford Gorse, down to the River Avon—an ugly place, one man nearly drowned his horse, I got well over by a sort of ford, in which the next man got a ducking—passed Lilbourne Station on the line for Catthorpe House, over the Rugby and Leicester turnpike, over the brook and up to Coton House, when I fear we changed our fox, but it was impossible to say which was right. Ran through Coton Park, crossed the road, bore to the left down to another brook, where a farmer had seen the fox ; bore to the left again for Cosford, through it, when, as they were going slowly for Bruntingthorpe, and Goodall's horse was beat and most of the others also, we thought it best to stop the hounds, after a fine run of 2 hours 2 minutes—much disappointed not to kill him, as we had run right through the Pytchley and Atherstone and got to the borders of the North Warwickshire. Wonderful day—ran 15 mile point, and we must have gone 20 miles or more. We had to take a special train at Rugby for Leicester, for horses and hounds, and did not get back till 9 o'clock. The longest day I remember. Goodall's horse died at Rugby next day.

Before this run almost any page in the season's record contains a good day ; here—opening at random—are three entries :

Nov. 23rd, 1865—Norton-by-Gaulby. Large field, fine day, ground in first rate order. Went to Glenn Gorse,—found a brace of foxes, one got away at the top, ran the belt up to the turnpike, over the brook and away like lightning to Glenn Oaks, over the Burton and Glenn bridle road down to the Burton Brook, over it, bore to the left leaving Burton Overy on the right, over the Gartree Road up to the plantations by Gaulby in 25 minutes without a check. Here we lost 3 minutes and they went away again over the Gaulby and Illston road, then 6 couples of hounds got ahead, got up to them at the Long Spinney, ran over the Rolleston road by Coney Hill plantation at Noseley, through Shangton Holt and back to the Hardwicks, when he got to ground after a good 50 minutes—ground awfully deep and horses slipping up in all directions. Went to Keythorpe Wood, drew it blank—found in Keythorpe Spinneys, ran through Ram's Head and over the turnpike as if for Loddington Reddish, bore to the right over the Loddington Brook, alongside the brook to Norton, by Belton Spinneys, past Belton down to the turnpike, crossed just opposite

Allexton Hill, over the hill, down to Horninghold village. Here he got headed and ran back by Allexton to Keythorpe, by Vowe's Gorse, through Ram's Head, where we saw him dead beat, and they caught him after a very good hour and 25 minutes. Horses all beat.

Nov. 25th.—Wardley Toll Bar—Wet day—went to Bisbrook, found a fox that went to ground immediately, the earths being open—drew Stoke Gorse blank—found a brace of foxes in the little wood at Stoke End. Ran as if for Wardley, headed back for Stoke End, at last got away by Stockerston village into Wardley Wood, over the Turnpike to Belton, and we lost him between Belton

THE PYTCHLEY COUNTRY NEAR HUSBANDS BOSWORTH.

and Loddington—wind blowing hard and no scent. Found again at Keythorpe, got away close to a fox, ran by the house, over the turnpike through Tugby Wood, up the hill through Colborough, up to Launde Big Wood, where someone headed him—got a middling scent through the wood, hit it off again and went for the Park Wood, but the scent was so bad we stopped and went home.

Nov. 27th.—Gumley. Large field, worst scenting day I ever saw—found a brace of foxes at Gumley Gorse, ran one up to the Laughton Hills, where he was headed in all directions, brought him back to Gumley where he skulked in a ditch and we ran over him—he went away after we had gone. Drew Gumley Wood blank. Going by Laughton village a fox jumped up parallel with the hounds, they ran him across two fields and lost him. Went on to

John Ball where they unfortunately chopped 2 foxes—got away with a third, ran as if for Theddingworth, over the brook up to the Mowsley road, here he headed back, ran almost to John Ball again and eventually we lost him. Scent so bad we went home.

There were several runs of two-and-a-half hours and at least one of over three hours, too long to quote, but the Rugby run was perhaps the best of all. Among notes of interest is one on February 1st, " The great sporting parson M.F.H., Jack Russell, was out with us and said he never saw so good a run in his life and never should see so good a one again ! " This run was one of two hours and fifty minutes from Norton Gorse to Blaston Pasture. On March 17th, after meeting at Great Glenn, the entry commences, " In consequence of the cattle plague having broken out at Wistow and Kilby we were turned out of the country, so that we had to go to John Ball to find a fox "—barely four miles away from the infected area ! The *résumé* is brief :

" This, in contradistinction to the last, has been the best season I ever hunted, the ground being as deep on the 26th March when we finished up as on the 6th Nov. when we began. The only frost we had was from the 1st to 8th March, so that the demand upon the horses has been very severe—I have been unlucky with my horses : Black Bess and Grey Plover being knocked out of time before Xmas and never came out again ; of the kennel horses, King Dan is almost broken down and will have to be fired, Oakham is dead, Jack Shepherd is lame, and a variety of other casualties attend both stables. As to sport, we have hardly ever been out without a run ; as to foxes, there have been plenty in the Monday's country, John Ball always holding two or three foxes—owing, I suppose, to its late neighbour being in quod ! "

The season 1866–67 was only moderate, the weather being very stormy ; forty-two foxes were killed in sixty-seven days' hunting. One great run must be quoted :

Feb. 2nd, 1867—*Somerby*. Found at the Dalby Spinney nearest to Pickwell, ran through the Punch Bowl, back over the hill towards Pickwell, again back through the Punch Bowl, away for Leesthorpe (where the hounds divided and I went on with 6½ couples, Goodall going with the rest through Gartree Hill up to Eye Kettleby, where he stopped them), we crossed the Leesthorpe and Pickwell road, ran almost to Rocart's, where we crossed the Melton and Oakham turnpike and bore away to the left down to the Whissendine, over

it almost to Whissendine village, left it on the right and up to Stapleford Park, where the fox was seen to go into Laxton's Covert. Put out a brace of foxes and ran one by the side of the park, down to the brook, over it, bore away again to the right as if for Burton Lazars, ran through Berry Gorse, where we saw the fox, up to Teigh and round to Laxton's Covert again. Over the brook, bore to the left up to Whissendine village and over the brook again, and away for Teigh through Edmondthorpe Park; bore away to the left, ran up to the railway after skirting Stapleford Park, where we again saw the fox, there he was headed back over the railway and they ran into him between Wymondham and Edmondthorpe, after running altogether 3 hours and 25 minutes. This was one of the finest hunting runs I ever saw, we must have run over 30 miles of ground, the first 2 hours and a quarter with only 6½ couples of hounds.

Is the fame of Tailby's Hounds surprising, when he had the pick of the Cottesmore country and the whole of the present Fernie country? And can it be wondered at, that he felt the curtailment of his country in 1872, after he had ranged from the Whissendine to the Welland, and run into Quorn country nearly to the Wreake, and down to the Avon in the Pytchley and North Warwickshire?

"The worst season I have had," is Tailby's comment after the season 1867–68 came to an end; stormy weather, absence of scent, "unruly fields of horsemen," and a dearth of good foxes in the Monday country all contributing to a poor total of runs, though the number of foxes killed was much the same. "I was laid up with a bad fall from the 24th Dec.," he writes, "and missed three days' hunting. Slouch fell with me at the Twyford Brook (slipped, I expect), threw her head up and almost dislocated my jaw, giving me a very bad wound, which had to be stitched up, and a severe concussion of the brain. I did not leave my bed for ten days."

This is the first really bad fall which Tailby mentions, after hunting the country for twelve seasons, his only previous absence being one day, missed as the result of a neglected "contusion of the ribs." He had had plenty of falls—"an ugly fall over a stile" is noted early in the journal—but the casualties so far had been confined to the Hunt servants, and there seem to have been few serious accidents worth recording to members of the field. The fame of his hounds may now be said to have reached its zenith, as proved

* Probably only fatal accidents or falls he saw himself (such as one where he assisted to extricate the rider) were mentioned by Tailby: General Fludyer was killed on January 31st, 1863.

by the increasingly large fields which attended his meets, often to the detriment of hunting. He makes few complaints, however, of hounds or huntsman being interfered with by too much holloaing, and this nuisance, which spoilt so many of his earlier runs, seems to have declined. The chief complaint of his later seasons is over-riding by the field.

Mention has not been made of the number of foxes run to ground each season, regularly recorded in the journal, but in nearly all seasons it was just a little less than the number killed, the difference being only one or two, and on more than one occasion the figures were the same. Exceptions were when the total of foxes killed was sixty or over ; then the number run to ground was usually about half ; but in the season 1863–64, seventy-seven foxes were run to ground to fifty-six killed. In addition, several foxes were accounted for each season—though these are not differentiated in the totals, and may sometimes be included—by being found dead close to where hounds had lost them, and on at least one occasion killed by villagers—" This fox we heard afterwards was got at by the foot-people of Hallaton and killed."

A very remarkable feature of the diary is the number of days recorded in which hunting was continued in spite of frost (" Sharp frost, but not too hard to hunt—9 degrees of frost." " Hard frost, met at 12—a lot of people there, so we hunted—not fit to ride " are typical entries), and sometimes it is not on account of unwillingness on Tailby's part to disappoint a large field ; for one entry begins " Hard frost—not a soul out, not fit to ride, so hunted alone," and ends " very good 35 minutes." Severe frost and snow with the thermometer at 21 degrees seems to have set the limit, conditions which caused a stoppage of twelve days, though hunting had continued in spite of frost until the thermometer registered this figure. In other ways the weather occasioned much discomfort considering the long rides to outlying meets—" poured with rain, wet through before we got there " describes a meet at Peatling. Often the ground was white with snow, a biting wind " blowing a gale so that we could hardly sit on our horses " ; but, apart from severe frost, hunting was only interfered with by fog. Dense fogs are often cited as making it impossible to draw certain coverts, chiefly those on the high ground round Tilton and Halstead.

During his first seasons Goodall had several mishaps, apart from breaking his collar-bone in a fall. On one occasion he " retired from the field having been kicked," and on another was absent some days because he had " been bitten by Furrier." * On all these occasions Tailby hunted the hounds himself.

* Entered in 1863 with Governess, walked by Mr. Hawley of Billesdon.

Two freak runs occurred in one day, March 2nd, 1867, after a meet at Blaston Pasture: "Drew Dent's Spinney blank, found in Holt Wood—fox went away as if for Great Easton; headed back directly, came through Holt Wood again and ran into a hollow tree—pulled the tree down (it was very rotten) and the fox bolted and they killed him in Holt Wood. Found again as we were crossing Blaston Pasture to draw Merivale Hole, the fox ran through the Blaston Spinneys where the earths are, and where a 2nd. fox jumped up that went towards Merivale Hole with all the field after it *but no*

FROST AND SNOW.

hounds. We ran *our* fox by Blaston village . . . nearly to Noseley Wood, where we gave him up after a good gallop."

Cub-hunting in 1868 began the best of all the seasons of Tailby's Mastership—foxes "all flyers" and only two days lost through frost. Sixty-two foxes were killed in ninety-nine days' hunting, and forty-nine run to ground. He sums up the cub-hunting: "The scent in the early part of the season was bad owing to the dry state of the ground; it was full of cracks big enough for a horse to put his foot in. Latterly the scent has improved and I have had some nice gallops after the rain. Found plenty of foxes in the small coverts, not so many in the woods—I expect many of them are underground. We have been out 23 days, killed 25 foxes and run 9 to ground. The ground is still very hard but there is every prospect of rain." The plentiful supply of foxes is indicated by the following entry:

Oct. 1*st.* 1868.—*Laughton Hills.* Found a capital show of foxes—ran one towards Gumley, back to the Hills and killed him. Found 3 or 4 more foxes in Perkin's plantation and killed one. Went on to Walton Holt where we had the bad luck to chop 2 foxes in covert, and they killed one outside—at least 4 foxes went away. I never saw so good a show at Walton Holt.

The regular hunting unfortunately commenced with a fatality, due no doubt to the hardness of the ground. As the ground became softer good runs followed in almost continuous succession, the words " good day " being written on almost every left-hand page of the diary, where comments are recorded, with one to seven exclamation marks according to the length of the run. A few entries are selected :

Nov. 18*th.* 1868—*Withcote Hall.* Found in Owston Little Wood, ran half through the Big Wood, away for Launde Abbey through the Park Wood, when we were holloa'd to a fresh fox, ran slowly down to Belton road, bore to the left by Quaker's Lodge and into Wardley Wood, where we had to give him up. Found again in a turnip field at Ridlington, ran very quick down the hill to the Manton Brook (here poor Somerville * was killed over a piece of timber and I stayed with him) along the brook-side, over Preston road and almost to Ayston, where we had them stopped. We stopped hunting on Thursday and Saturday out of respect to the memory of poor Somerville.

Jan 21*st.* 1869—*Houghton.* Goodall not out.† Found a fox in a ploughed field at the back of Evington Hall, ran up to Stoughton, here he was headed and ran back as if for Thurnby, crossed the Stoughton and Thurnby road, almost to Hall's Lodge. Here he went almost to Houghton, bore to the right over the Norton Brook, left Norton Gorse and Gaulby on the right, and ran almost to Billesdon, over the Rolleston and Billesdon road and down the hill for Skeffington Vale, ran along the brook-side almost to Rolleston Gorse, over the brook, over the Goadby road and up to Keythorpe Wood. Here there was a little delay from sheep, but he ran on for Glooston Wood, straight through the end of it, and down the hill for Stonton Brook, over the brook and up to Noseley Wood, through it and up to Coney Hill, where they pulled him down after a very fine hunting run of 2 hours and 17 minutes. Found again at Shangton Holt, ran quickly through the Hardwicks, past

* Lord Somerville, killed at the age of twenty-nine through his horse slipping when taking off at some low rails.

† On the 19th there was a very hard run from the Punch Bowl to Croxton Kerrial of over 17 miles, which may explain his absence, though no accident is recorded.

THE HARDWICKS

Noseley Wood, over the Stonton Brook, running fast through Stonton Wood up to Glooston village, between Glooston Wood and Keythorpe Wood almost to Goadby, over the Noseley Brook by the Hall, through the Hardwicks again and up to the road by Shangton Holt, into which hounds did not go again as we could not chase another fox. Capital 40 minutes—best day of the season so far ! ! ! ! !

Feb. 18*th.—Tugby Toll Bar.* Lot of people out. Found a good fox at Vowe's Gorse, ran for Simkin's Farm, turned to the left over the hill, down the hill for Finchley Bridge, over the turnpike, across Belton Brook,* very strong, up to the Loddington and Belton Road, over it at the bottom of the hill, through Launde Park Wood, along the brook † and over it at Cole's Lodge, when he was headed over the brook again, ran up the hill towards Launde Park Wood and they ran into him in the small plantation between the hills after a very good 38 minutes. Much pleased, as Musters ‡ was out. Drew Skeffington and Tilton Woods, Rolleston, Noseley and Shangton Holt blank. Got on the line of a disturbed fox at Stonton Wood (where they were cutting wood), ran through Glooston Wood, away as if for Keythorpe Wood, over Hallaton Bottoms, up to the brickyard, over the Allexton and Horninghold roads up to Blaston village, ran as if for Dent's Spinney and bore to the right for Medbourne, over the road and up to Holt. They ran hard over the grass, leaving Holt Wood on the right, and on to the Great Easton road not far from the village which they left on the right, over the brook,§ leaving Stoke Dry just on the left, over the road and down to Lyddington, left the village on the right and ran across the Seaton road almost to Uppingham, then across the Bisbrook and Seaton road, where he lay down, and along the brook-side under Bisbrook, and they ran into him one field from the village, in the open, after as fine a run as I ever saw of 1 hour and 50 minutes. Went over 18 miles of country—the best day's sport I have had, or that I ever saw, and the most severe day for horses. Killed our second fox at 5.30 and did not get to Billesdon till 9 p.m. Horses terribly beat—seven had to be left out. Shamrock could only just raise a trot, and she was the freshest of my establishment ! ! ! ! ! ! !

And so it had been throughout the season, hardly a day without a good run, and four days a week. Over such a country distance only tells half the

* The River Eye.
† The River Chater.
‡ The Master of the Quorn.
§ The River Eye.

tale ; the precipitous hills of High Leicestershire take it out of a horse even on a poor day, and it is largely due to Tailby's very light weight that he was always to the fore. Most of his horses, as stated, were up to fourteen stone, but he had some small horses in his stable which carried him well in some of the stiffest runs. Of all the horses in his stable, perhaps Grey Plover was most celebrated—the grey on which he has so often been described leading the field over the great thorn fences and ugly bottoms of the Cottesmore highlands or the timbers of the Harborough country. The oxers, by the way, were in some cases being replaced by wire, but there is very little mention of wire up to this time in the diary ; Goodall's bad fall was over a double oxer two years later.

About this time the whippers-in were Dick Christian and Will Grant ; James Bailey, later famous as huntsman to the Essex, having left the establishment. Of Dick Christian it is not necessary to speak, though he was rather past his prime, but the 2nd whip, Grant—afterwards huntsman to the Earl of Macclesfield's, Sir Bache Cunard's and Lord Middleton's hounds—was considered by Goodall to be the best whip he ever had.

The season of 1869–70 was eclipsed by the one that had preceded it. It was a hard winter and the ground very dry. The attendance at Tailby's fixtures, however, was steadily increasing, and he records a field of a thousand when hounds met at Illston-on-the-Hill in January 1870 !

Goodall had his bad fall towards the end of the season that followed and was laid up for two months. The fall is graphically described by Henry Custance in " Riding Recollections and Turf Stories." The fence was a double oxer (the rails were exactly twelve feet apart) near Manton Gorse, and Custance and another had just cleared it :

" Just then, hounds turned short back to the covert ; I happened to look round and saw a loose horse galloping across the field, and a man in a scarlet coat lying on the ground, who I was afraid (as it turned out to be) was Frank Goodall. I immediately went and caught his horse and asked Mr. Powell to go and see to him. . . . Presently, as the fox doubled back to the gorse, up came two doctors—Mr. Snell and Mr. Crane—who happened to be out hunting. They examined Goodall . . . felt his pulse, and looked gravely at each other. I asked them if they would like to have him moved to my place at once. They, however, shook their heads and said : ' No ; if he lives anywhere, he will live here for a quarter of an hour.' Gradually his pulse and temperature became more normal . . . and we took him to my home at Manton. There he remained for a month, and never recollects to this day

having been to my house at all. It was a miraculous escape, and the fall was as nearly as possible breaking his neck."

This season, like the last, was spoilt by weather, but Tailby ended his connection with the Cottesmore country with one more great season, 1871–72, which he describes as the best he had known, though—as in the case of runs—the immediate past seems to exclude from his memory days long gone by. His enthusiasm warms to the events of the moment. But great runs there were, and foxes in great abundance, "almost too much so, the woodland foxes very good and stout." Alas! It was farewell to the woodland foxes. "So ends my connection with the Cottesmore country," he writes sadly. The great days over the hills and vales, over the wide grass fields away to the Burton Flats and Melton were ended for ever with the volume of his journal which closed with the spring of 1872.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST SIX SEASONS

"Commenced cub-hunting to-day with 34 couple of bitches in the kennel (27 old and 7 young ones), kept at Skeffington—Christian kennel-huntsman and 1st whip—Grant 2nd whip—30 horses in stable. Ground is very good owing to the wet summer, but country as blind as midnight."—W. W. TAILBY.

THE statement made by some authors—including Mr. Costobadie—that when, in November 1871, Mr. Tailby intimated his desire to resign at the end of the season, Colonel Lowther (who became Lord Lonsdale in 1872) had not put in his legitimate claim to the Cottesmore country hunted by Mr. Tailby, is incorrect: the inference, of course, being that the claim was made because of Mr. Tailby's intended resignation. In October 1871 reports of Colonel Lowther's claim to the western portion of the Cottesmore country relinquished by Sir John Trollope, and Mr. Tailby's consequent intention of resigning, appeared in *The Leicester Journal*.

In the spring of 1872 Frank Goodall left the county to take up his post of huntsman to the historic Royal Buckhounds—better known then as the Queen's Staghounds—and Tailby carried the horn for the four following seasons, only handing it over to Dick Christian, his 1st whip, because of the urgent necessity for a Field Master. Why he could not have found someone to act as Field Master, or why he did not appoint a huntsman at once to replace Goodall, are questions of much interest, because the huntsman he eventually selected for his last season, Richard Summers, does not seem to have been altogether a success. For sixteen seasons Tailby's hounds had gained a steadily increasing reputation for pace, and the number of hard riders attracted to his country had made the task of controlling his fields a very difficult one. It was, indeed, an irony of fate that the splendid sport he had shown was the main cause of his giving up the Mastership: his fields became dissatisfied unless they could have the stirring gallops associated with his name, week in week out, whether foxes were killed or not, whether scent was good or bad; they came to ride. For seven months out of every year,

for sixteen years, Tailby himself had seen little else but the flying sterns of his hounds, and often, as his diary tells us, the flying brush of the fox as well. He was nearly always up at the end; sometimes with six or seven of his followers whose horses could hardly stand, sometimes alone, or with a single companion who helped him call off the hounds when light was gone. It is hardly surprising that when he lost the huntsman who had been with him for half this period, he should elect to hunt the hounds himself, but it was a strategical error. Tactically, it answered well enough—for four seasons; the average of good runs increased rather than declined: when he was forced to get a huntsman, the field becoming so unmanageable that he could not attend to it and to the hounds at the same time, the change was disastrous. The obvious alternative, to get a Field Master—the only solution of the difficulty for a Master who hunts his own hounds—seems to have been overlooked, or, for some reason, to have been impracticable.

Before the curtailment of the country, the Billesdon Hunt had met four days a week—the great days which drew such large fields were the "Tailby Thursdays." The Thursday country included the Cottesmore woods and Tilton and Launde, but also a great part of the present Fernie Thursday country and a small part of the present alternate Friday–Saturday country. Tailby's Mondays included the whole of the Leicester side of his country (including all the present Monday country); his Tuesdays were in the far side of his Cottesmore territory, from Cole's Lodge northward; and his Saturdays in the remainder of the present Saturday country, but extending to the Cottesmore country round Bisbrooke and Ayston. After the season 1871–72 he only hunted five days a fortnight, the respective areas being very much what they are to-day—the Saturday country being hunted once a fortnight. Many of the Monday fixtures were round Marston, a covert that came into great prominence and nearly always held foxes being Papillon Gorse (Pamps Gorse to-day), which is hardly mentioned in the first two volumes of the journal.

Tailby has often been written of as an indifferent huntsman—he is said to have had no gift for hound-language—and the last seasons of his Mastership have been underrated accordingly; but the pages of his diary hardly bear this out. The totals of foxes killed for the first four seasons after Goodall left are forty-five, sixty, fifty-seven and sixty-eight, the average number of days hunted each season being seventy-seven.* During Goodall's last season

* There were several bye-days when Wardley Wood and other coverts were drawn by permission of Lord Lonsdale.

(one of the best of Tailby's seasons for runs) forty-nine foxes were killed in a hundred and five days' hunting. It only remains to examine the quality of the sport shown as regards runs when Tailby was his own huntsman. Two of the seasons are rated in the diary as very good, one as average, and one as bad, owing to frost. It must be admitted that on a few occasions runs seem unnecessarily prolonged (one fox finished a three-and-a-half hours' run by running " backwards and forwards " between Noseley and Rolleston for an hour, when he was killed ; another run lasted four hours, all in the neighbourhood of Wardley Wood) and that there is a slightly larger percentage of foxes chopped in covert ; but there are as many " very good gallops " and " capital 40 minutes " written against the entries as before. A typical one is the entry for January 11th, 1873 :

Jan. 11th—Allexton. Found in Allexton Wood, ran up to Wardley Wood, back to Allexton Wood, away for Stoke End, right through both woods, over the brook, skirting Merivale Hole, up to Stockerston Wood, through it and over the Eye by Merivale Hole ; then by Lyddington, to the right over the railway, leaving Gretton on the left, for Rockingham Forest, and they pulled him down within one field of Rockingham Forest after one of the finest runs I ever saw of 1 hour and 45 minutes—every hound up.

There are some interesting runs during the next season, 1873–74, a few of which must be quoted, together with one or two from the season that followed—the worst in Tailby's experience, on account of weather. The first two runs are raids into the Pytchley country :

Nov. 17th 1873—*Marston.* Found 3 or 4 foxes at Papillon Gorse, ran up to Lubenham, back to the gorse, by Bennett's up to the Coombes, through Sibbertoft Wood and they brought him back almost to Marston and ran into him. Found again on the Hothorpe Hills, ran by Sibbertoft on the right, through Long Hold, through Naseby Gorse, where we charged on by Naseby Obelisk, through Tally-ho, where there was another fox, and up to Hazelbech. Here we were holloa'd on to Cottesbrook, but as it was a fresh fox we gave him up after a very fine hunting run—home 7 p.m.

Jan. 15th 1874—*Little Stretton.* Found an outlying fox near Stoughton, ran by the Hall grounds up to Evington, where he got to ground in an old hovel that had tumbled in—couldn't get him out. Found again at Thurnby Spinney * a hive of foxes, ran over turnpike, through Scraptoft Spinneys on

* A small spinney—Thurnby Covert was planted by Sir Bache Cunard about 1885.

the right of the covert, by Keyham, over the Hungerton road, and they ran him to ground between Hungerton and Baggrave after a nice gallop.

Feb. 2nd—Gumley. Went to Papillon Gorse, found immediately, ran very quick through the Lubenham gardens, over the Harboro' steeplechase course, under Farndon Mill, over the large enclosures up to the turnpike, ran close by Oxendon Church and up to the railway close to Waterloo Gorse, where he got to ground. Sent for a terrier, and whilst waiting for him another fox

THE VALLEY OF THE EYE NEAR MERIVALE HOLT.

jumped up in the same field, ran by Oxendon and back to Waterloo, where he got to ground: left him, went back to our original fox, the terrier bolted him and they ran into him on the railway.

Feb. 26th—Slawston. Pouring wet day—too stormy to draw Slawston Gorse, so went on to Glooston Wood, ran through Glooston Wood by Rippon's farm, through Hallaton wood, and over Hallaton Bottoms up to Moor Hill, through it and on to Ram's Head, where he was viewed and they killed him in the round spinney adjoining. Found again at the Hardwicks, ran very fast up-wind, over Noseley Brook, through Stonton Wood, through Glooston and up to Fallow Closes, where he was headed; ran back through Glooston

Wood and Noseley plantations up to Shangton Holt, where we gave him up—wet through.

Sept. 14th 1874—*Holt.* Found immediately in Holt Wood, ran him round the covert and killed him. Found again in the middle covert, which they call " America," ran through the last planting, up to the osier-bed, back as if for Great Easton, back through Holt Wood and America again, and he went to ground in a field near Holt—bolted him, gave him lots of law, and killed him.

Jan. 28th, 1875—*Rolleston.* A fox got up out of a hedgerow, ran to the gorse, got up a tree, was sent down, ran over Rolleston Farm, by the end of the Long Spinney, by Allen's Lodge and over the turnpike, where he got to ground after a very good 25 minutes. Found again in Keythorpe Wood, ran by Keythorpe Hall down to Loddington Mill, and he got to ground. Found again in Vowe's Gorse, ran very quick by East Norton up to Loddington Hall, where he got up the flue of the conservatory, smoked him out, he came out of the chimney-pot, ran him 10 minutes and killed him after a good gallop.

Feb. 8th—Kilby. Frosty—went on to Blaby Spinneys—did not find, nor at Whetstone Gorse. Found a brace of foxes in Little Peatling, ran one to Bruntingthorpe, bore to the right and ran by Ashby and Dunton to Leire, where he got to ground on the railway embankment after a very good 50 minutes.

Except for the incident of the flue, these extracts are selected at random and are fair samples of the average sport of the period; there were longer runs, but none of any remarkable length but the two previously mentioned, which were slow runs. The entries show how different areas were being hunted. Neither Blaby nor Papillon appear much in the earlier volumes as draws, and there are frequent excursions into the Pytchley country—Naseby has very rarely been mentioned before.

The season 1875–76, the twentieth of Tailby's Mastership, was much the best he had had since the changed conditions, and the best he was to record before giving up the hounds—it ranks among the half dozen best seasons of his career. Foxes were very plentiful and cub-hunting started well; a typical day was at Frisby:

Oct. 7th 1875—*Frisby.* Found 5 or 6 foxes, in Norton Gorse, killed one, ran another for 15 minutes and killed him; got away with another, ran for

LEFT BEHIND

the brook headed back for Stretton road, and they ran into him. Found in 1st Black's Spinney and killed him; found in 2nd Black's Spinney and killed him. Went away with another, ran to Stretton, where he got to ground against Hobson's house. Found four or five foxes in Glenn Gorse, ran one very quickly up to Glenn village into Crick's garden, where we left him on account of the glass—good day's work.

The country was very blind and very deep when regular hunting commenced; "never remember it so deep at *any time of the year*," writes Tailby; and there was every prospect of a really good season. "Commenced regular hunting on Nov. 1st with 40½ couple," so ends a brief *résumé* of cub-hunting, the young hounds having entered well in spite of the want of woodlands which was now a serious difficulty. Fast runs followed in regular succession with very few bad days, especially after January 1st; a run ending with a kill in the housekeeper's room at Stretton Hall heads the following selections of a few of the best:

Jan. 27th 1876—Illston. Found in a moment at the Hardwicks, ran over the brook up to Stonton Wood, out over the brook again through the Hardwicks, though Shangton Holt, bore to the left by Pateman's Lodge, by Carlton Hall, as if for Illston, bore to the left through Carlton village by the brookside, over the brook at Black's farm, down to Burton Overy, through Bethune's paddock and out over the road and brook: ran by the end of Glenn Oaks, left Stackley on the right, over the Glenn Brook * and up to Stretton Hall where the fox and 2 couple of hounds jumped through the window into the housekeeper's room,† and they killed him after the best run I ever rode to of 1 hour and 15 minutes—best pace all the way.

Feb. 21st—Shearsby. Drew Ashby blank. Clarke had caught a fox in his stick-heap at Peatling which he put down in the covert, and which gave us a successful run—went by Ashby, back to Little Peatling and Bruntingthorpe up to Walton; then by Gilmorton up to Misterton, over the railway and straight up to Bitteswell, where they ran into him after a fine run of 1 hour and 20 minutes. Found again at Walton Holt, ran by Walton and Gilmorton up to Cotes de Val in the Atherstone country, where we gave him up after a very good 50 minutes—a very hard day, hounds did not get home till 8 o'clock!

Feb. 26th—Holt. Found at Watson's Gorse, ran slowly by Blaston Pasture

* The River Sence.

† The servants were at dinner, and the fox was killed under the table.

up to Fearn Farm and lost. Found him again in Allexton Wood, ran on to Allexton and to ground. Found again in Allexton Wood, ran through Wardley Wood, up to Beaumont Chase, back to Allexton Wood by Wardley, by Quaker's Lodge, and back to Wardley Wood and away for Ayston Toll Bar, through Ayston Spinney, along the valley for Bisbrooke leaving Glaston on the right and Glaston Gorse on the left, down to Morcott, bore to the left almost to

GILMORTON COVERT.

Luffenham and on to Lynton, where we changed foxes. Then ran through Pilton earths under Wing, and on through Manton Station by Manton and we stopped 'em going away for Gunthorpe at 4.30, after a splendid run of over 2 hours—ran over 14½ miles as the crow flies after 3 p.m. (1 hour and 30 minutes from Ayston Spinney). Horses all beat—hardest day of the season, horses left out.

In his *résumé* of this season Tailby writes :

" April 8th finished our season, and it has been as good as any I can remember—ground very deep owing to continuous rain, consequently scent good, very good up to March, which set in very boisterous consequently scent not so good. Our 40 couples of bitches have done very well and killed more foxes than usual. Our coverts, especially Sheepthorns and Glenn Gorse have done wonderfully well in the Thursday's country *—on the Monday side Peatling, Ashby, Wistow and John Ball have been failures, here our great mainstay has been Papillon, Walton Holt and Gumley, which always held foxes. . . . This finished my 20th season as M.F.H."

During the season 1876–77, Tailby gave up the horn to Dick Christian, the field being " so terribly interfering," and thereafter Christian was " so interfered with by the field that he failed to kill his foxes." The note of irritation and complaints against the field which colours Tailby's record of his last two seasons, ending with a very bitter outpouring when he decided to resign, must not be taken too seriously. He was asking for trouble when he handed over the horn to Dick Christian, that grand old veteran being well past his prime, on which account he was rated second to Grant as a whipper-in by Goodall some years before, though he still retained the post of 1st whip. The country was too full of foxes, " so that each day when we had one half-beat, up we had another, and so on all day and every day, the result being that we did not kill so many as usual," and this added to Christian's embarrassments. The ground was very heavy, and the season was a hard one for horses; but in spite of difficulties there was a fair average of good runs to satisfy the " enormous fields " which still attended the Thursday meets, and also the meets in the now much more popular Monday country.

The two best runs were a seventeen mile point from Ashby Magna by Gilmorton, Kilworth and Welford to within a mile of Tally-ho Covert in the Pytchley country and nearly to Oxendon, when they lost him, after two hours and twenty minutes; and a ring lasting over three hours from Keythorpe Wood over Quorn country and back to Skeffington Wood, where hounds were stopped. During this run the Quorn crossed the line near Billesdon Windmill. There were several casualties among the Hunt horses this season, and Tailby had the misfortune to lose Douglas, one of his best hunters (the horse fell on a harrow left wrong side up in a field); many of the others were " quite knocked out of time." In fact, the number of very hard days, as distinct from particularly brilliant runs, was above the average. The record of one of these is worth quoting :

* Glenn Gorse was in his Monday country until 1872.

Feb. 1st, 1877—Rolleston. Found a fox up a tree at Rolleston, ran him by the covert, through Noseley, back to Rolleston and through Noseley again, and they ran into him between New Inn and Illston after a very good 50 minutes. Went to a holloa in the Hardwicks, ran through Noseley Wood up to Stonton Wood, over Rippon's Farm, by Glooston Wood up to Keythorpe, over the turnpike to Tugby Bushes, and away from Tryon's Spinney, through Skeffington Wood, over Skeffington High Field and over the Vale up to Rolleston. Then by Noseley and almost up to Stonton Wood again, when he was said to have gone up a tree—got him down but he was a fresh fox—ran by Keythorpe up to Keythorpe Hall and we stopped 'em going again for the woods at 4 p.m.—all beat. Capital day's sport—running 4 hours ! ! ! !

The epithet, by the way, was a favourite one of Goodall's, who pronounced it " carpital " and rarely described a great run by any other term.

Richard Summers was appointed huntsman before the season commenced in 1877, and although he was at first successful in satisfying the rather exacting hard-riding members of the field, he could not do so for long. The fault does not seem to have been with him or with Tailby, and perhaps not with the field either : the cause of dissatisfaction may well have been outside the immediate sphere of the Hunt. There is more than a hint in Tailby's *résumé* that the dispute of 1878 was brewing and that his country was divided on the question of its future.

There were many good runs, especially in the earlier part of the season, and the number of foxes killed (forty-eight) was four more than the preceding season during fewer days' hunting, seventy-seven instead of eighty-four. The runs were not so good towards the end, scent being bad ; the last really good run was on February 18th—a rattling hour and forty minutes from Glenn Gorse by Oadby and Knighton almost to Leicester racecourse ; then back to Glenn Gorse, where a fresh fox got up and went away over the Burton and Carlton Brooks and by Kibworth and Thorpe Langton to within a short distance of Weston, being lost between that village and Welham. The distance was eighteen miles and the time as stated above, with five minutes' delay after running back to Glenn Gorse. " Had we killed him," writes Tailby, " it would have been the best run I ever saw." His last gallop as Master was on April 4th, from the Pond Spinneys at Rolleston by the Skeffington Vale, round by the Ashlands to Illston, through Gaulby Spinneys and by Norton Gorse towards Houghton, when, being late in the evening and foxes having been changed after Gaulby, hounds were taken home.

Then follows the *résumé*, written after twenty-two years as Master of the Hunt :

" This has been a remarkably open season, during which we were only stopped three or four days. Sport has been very fair, foxes very plentiful, and scent better than average, with the exception of the last month when the ground was dry and hard. A season fraught with some good-will, but, I fear, many bickerings and dissatisfactions. Satiated with too much hunting and too open weather, grumbling is the natural result of sportsmen (?) so affected. The new huntsman, Summers, at the beginning of the season did everything that was right—killed his foxes, rode to his hounds, and was a success. Then came a revulsion of feeling. The over-indulged began to think him slow, he couldn't ride ! he couldn't gallop ! he couldn't kill his foxes ! All this was to me gall and wormwood, and it worried me so much that I decided to give up the country. I felt that I had done my best for the country, and they were not satisfied, so I sent in my resignation ; and that again brought on great discord, as to who was to be my successor. Coupland was first in the field, and got many friends thereby. Cunard came later on to hunt the country in its present boundaries. He, of course, was hailed by me and all the farmers with the greatest enthusiasm, as we did not expect to find a man to hunt the country that I had just resigned. Most of the covert owners are for Cunard, but some three or four for Coupland, and so we are all at discord. Cunard has bought my hounds for £1200, and taken possession of them on April 8th. I wish him success. I cannot retire without expressing to one and all—covert owners, farmers, subscribers and peasants—how grateful I am for their support and interest for the last twenty-two years. I have enjoyed a very happy reign, and cannot but say that I resign the hounds with the deepest regret. My occupation gone, I expect I shall sink into a worn-out and premature old man—God grant that it may not be so. And now good-bye forever to my office and to the happiest period of my career."

Despondent, even bitter words—but Tailby's was a nature easily roused to enthusiasm and as easily depressed. Read the last sentences of his *résumé*, and then read how he crossed the Leicester racecourse (near the scene of one of his " last runs ") nearly twenty years later—the quotation is from a local paper :

" About an hour prior to the commencement of racing a fox was observed making his way across the course in the direction of Wigston. The directorate, as soon as they grasped the situation, gave orders for the paddock gates to be thrown open, and the unusual sight of the hounds, huntsman and party

careering on to the course in pursuit of Reynard was witnessed. The scene aroused the enthusiasm of all present, and volleys of ' view halloas ' went forth from the assembled crowd as the party, numbering close upon a hundred, galloped past the stands, and amongst the foremost we noticed Mr. Fernie, the Master of the Billesdon Hounds, the Duchess of Hamilton, Sir Bache Cunard and Mr. Tailby."

And again, nearly ten years later, he wrote in his diary, " the best 30 minutes I ever saw in my life ! ! ! "

CHAPTER VI

THE OLD SCHOOL AND THE NEW

"He was a grand sportsman of the old school."
OBITUARY NOTICE OF MR. TAILBY, 1914.

THE term of Sir Bache Cunard's Mastership of the Billesdon Hunt has a peculiar significance in the history of the Harborough country. The period was a critical one for hunting in Leicestershire as a whole, and for the present Fernie country in particular; the old days were passing and with them the large areas hunted by the older packs. Changes and exchanges of country according to the convenience of Hunts, or the scarcity of foxes in one district and their abundance in another (a cause which led to many temporary alterations of country in the past) were now becoming less frequent and what changes were made were likely to be permanent. Sir Bache Cunard took the Hunt at the critical time when the new order of things was supplanting the old in Leicestershire.

When constructing a history of the Harborough country, bearing this in mind, the first year of his Mastership may be compared to the keystone of an arch which rises on one side from the classic days of Meynell and Osbaldeston, and descends on the other to the hunting field as we know it to-day, the span bridging exactly a century.* Tailby had more in common with Meynell and Tom Noel (to whose assiduously kept diary his own has a striking resemblance) than had any other sportsman of his time. The reason he gave for his resignation was not new; Thomas Hodgson resigned the Mastership of the Quorn in 1841 because of overriding fields, and as far back as Peter Beckford's time we find the same complaint. Tailby clung obstinately to the older ideas of hunting. He would not admit the changed outlook, the desire to ride rather than hunt in the old sense that had been steadily growing ever since Melton rose to fame, and that is so well expressed by "Septuagenarian" in one of the series of articles which recently appeared in *The Daily Telegraph:* "In Leicestershire," he writes, "deny it who may, people mostly foregather for

* Osbaldeston resigned the Mastership of the Quorn in 1827.

the gallop. Blood horses at £400, £500, and £600 apiece are not stabled thereabouts for the pleasure of seeing foxes scientifically walked out of scent." It was due to Tailby's own passion for riding, and to his very efficient huntsmen, that he satisfied his followers without question or complaint for his first sixteen seasons, in spite of his often expressed opinion that hunting was in his first days a science, and had later become only a question of emulation : more truly has modern hunting in Leicestershire been designated an art—the art of riding to hounds.

Hard rider though he was, Tailby had an intense dislike of having his hounds in any way interfered with and very strong ideas on the subject of changing foxes. The point is worth noting, because he has often been described as essentially a riding man. It is also notable that his best seasons, with few exceptions, were those when Goodall was huntsman—and Goodall knew a trick or two which he practised quite unknown to Tailby. Like Tom Firr, Goodall was not above a ruse on occasions when the field was unusually impetuous or thirsting for a kill. Custance relates an amusing story of how a fox was chopped in covert and Goodall ordered the 1st whip to come on at once on the line of another, with the carcass of the first fox in his inside coat pocket. Scent was good, but after a fast run hounds lost their fox. A slight delay occurred. " What is Goodall trying to do ? Why don't he give it up ? " said Tailby. A few minutes later a loud tally-ho announced a kill, and the field went home well pleased with Goodall's perseverance ! " Frank Goodall was the most cheery huntsman I ever met. He was up to as many tricks as a monkey, both on and off duty," writes Custance.

Such stories, of course, detract in no way from the accounts of Tailby's great runs of the 'sixties, though now and again a little skilful manipulation may have sent his followers home happy after what might have been a dull day ; nor do they imply that the modern hunting field, as far as Leicestershire is concerned, demands other than strictly scientific methods : but the fact remains that runs there had to be, and that fields of five hundred or more would not be satisfied—and will not be satisfied to-day—with slow hunting and inadequate results. Emulation too, in spite of Tailby's protest against it, will always be a dominant factor in the Leicestershire hunting field, and the art of riding to hounds well over the Leicestershire country is so difficult that it is just and reasonable it should be so.

Sir Bache Cunard may be said in some ways to have been the founder of the present Fernie country, or to have made the rather restricted area to which Tailby's country had been reduced a more complete and self-contained whole.

SHEEPTHORNS

He planted at least one new covert—Thurnby—and attended to many of the others, which had been much neglected. Even when Mr. Fernie became Master, a number of the coverts were in a very bad state, and it remained for the genius of "Charles" * Isaac, his first huntsman, a master of the art of covert-making, to continue the good work commenced by Sir Bache Cunard. A feature of the modern school of fox-hunting was the creation of artificial fox coverts, the older sportsmen having relied to a greater extent on their woodlands, and of most of these the Billesdon country had been shorn in 1872. This is not the place to detail the coverts planted by Charles Isaac—they included Tamboro Hill and Skevington Gorse, besides many others. It is, however, the place to give the veteran's ideas on the art of covert-making, which stand for all time and for any country.

The object of artificial coverts, of course, is to attract foxes to lay up in them, and the first condition to bear in mind is exactly what does attract the fox, presuming that he can choose his strongholds and can select the coverts which suit him best. Many coverts hold foxes because they have nowhere else to go; but given a choice, there are always two kinds they will prefer, the gorse and the blackthorn. In the daytime a fox wants concealment, but he also wants the daylight; he does not want to spend his time in a place resembling a cellar or subterranean corridor—he has his earths; he wants to be concealed with the open sky above him. For this very reason foxes lie up in cornfields before the harvest. A low growth of gorse or blackthorn is the fox's ideal refuge. When a covert becomes choked with elder which kills everything else, or straggling blackthorn which gives open spaces below and a close tangle above, it ceases to hold foxes, should other refuge be available.

The lay-out of a gorse covert is comparatively simple. The English countryside in earlier days was largely gorse-grown when not under cultivation; but when the soil is poor, the gorse degenerates and the seeds remain dormant in the ground for fifty years or longer. A new gorse covert can often be formed by enriching the soil and cultivating it, growing, perhaps, a field of corn for one or two seasons, then harvesting and leaving the ground fallow. The dormant gorse-seeds spring up and a close, healthy growth of gorse is the result. In the same way a thin gorse covert can gradually be renovated by clearing a section at a time and growing corn, until the whole covert is renewed by this process. Watson's gorse was treated very successfully in

* Thomas Isaac was always known as "Charles," the name he adopted because there was another Thomas in the Pytchley Kennels when he was whipper-in to the Hunt.

this way by Charles Isaac, and there is a picture in his possession showing a large strip of this covert under corn. The method is practically infallible, and as simple as it is effective.

The method for planting or renovating a blackthorn covert is not so simple, but equally efficacious. The ideal blackthorn covert should contain no other growth at all. A few larches and a little privet may be planted at each corner—purely for ornament, as Isaac would say—but the covert itself should be a square plot of low blackthorn surrounded by a whitethorn hedge. The difference between the two thorns is that live blackthorn, that is blackthorn which has not been choked out of existence or nearly so by other growth (notably elder), will spread and spring up from the roots extending for a considerable space underground, while whitethorn will not. If the ground is completely cleared between live blackthorn twenty yards apart a new and close growth will spring up. The method, then, of renovating a blackthorn covert is to clear sections of it, rooting up all elder and other obstructions, leaving only sufficient of the live thorn to give the new growth, and at the same time cutting and laying a corresponding section of the surrounding whitethorn fence. This should be done at intervals, if the covert is to be kept in good order, whenever the blackthorn grows too high and becomes straggling, until the whole covert has been cleared in sections.

Such are the ideal coverts for foxes and the ideal methods of keeping them in a state of perfection, but turning from the ideal to the practical, there are many obstacles in the way and a compromise is necessary. Many covert owners would strongly object to having all the trees cut down in their spinneys, and square plots of low blackthorn and gorse substituted. Even were this possible, constant supervision and skilled labour is necessary to keep them in order, and this means expense. Moreover, there are many other forms of covert which are effective substitutes and hold foxes if they have nowhere else to go. The cut-and-laid covert has been very successful in Leicestershire. Ash or other saplings are chopped with an axe about two feet from the ground and allowed to fall horizontally so as to roof the space beneath, which becomes choked with brambles and scattered thorn. These when well made are really effective strongholds, where the foxes cannot be disturbed by marauding sheep-dogs, and where they feel secure, but they do not fulfil the condition of a space open to the sky. A particularly successful covert on these lines is the Prince of Wales's at Baggrave, probably the most scientifically constructed of its kind in Leicestershire. The cut saplings allow other trees to grow through them and the appearance of the covert is not affected. But a great

many of the coverts in the Fernie country are not spinneys with any scenic value; John and Jane Ball, Sheepthorns, Mowsley Covert and Tamboro Hill are true artificial fox coverts, and to these, and many others, Isaac gave his attention at the commencement of Mr. Fernie's Mastership. He constructed the covert Tamboro Hill, joining it on to a small spinney already there, Sir Bache Cunard having done much the same with Thurnby.

MEDBOURNE CHURCH AND THE OLD PACK-HORSE BRIDGE.

The kennels at Medbourne were built by Cunard immediately after Tailby's resignation; they were used throughout Mr. Fernie's Mastership and for one season by Lord Stalbridge. The present kennels were built at Great Bowden in 1923 and first used in 1924.

For two seasons Richard Summers remained as huntsman with Sir Bache Cunard, and W. Sheppard was 1st whip. In 1880 Will Grant—who had been 2nd whip to Goodall in Tailby's time—came from Lord Macclesfield as huntsman, and Tom Newman, afterwards huntsman to the Cambridgeshire,

was 1st whip. Grant was huntsman until Mr. Fernie took the hounds in 1888.

The ten years of Sir Bache Cunard's Mastership were entirely successful. He spared neither trouble nor expense in order to show good sport, and his resignation was received with great regret by the whole country.

There is not space here to give details of the runs of the time; some will be referred to when describing the country. Only very brief records are available for a great proportion of them. Tailby's journal gives many in detail, but he also hunted with the Cottesmore after resigning and some of the best days are omitted from his pages. Mr. Costobadie quotes a few records given by Cunard from his own diary, which is much briefer than Tailby's. One great run of four hours and ten minutes took place on January 8th, 1882, starting from Walton Holt. The fox ran nearly to the Laughton Hills, by Bosworth Gorse to Theddingworth and then on to Gaulby. The fox had here far outdistanced the hounds, but, as the record rather quaintly states, "He waited for us," and the run continued back by Walton and Gilmorton to Bitteswell; here foxes were changed, but hounds ran the line of the second fox by Ullesthorpe Station to Cotesbach, where he went to ground. The hounds were brought home by train from Rugby.

The Cunard family resided for nearly fifty years at Nevill Holt, the beautiful and ancient seat of the Nevills, situated on the hill above Medbourne, looking out over Rockingham Forest to the south and High Leicestershire to the north. Sir Bache Cunard, the third Baronet, succeeded his father, Sir Edward, in 1869. The first Baronet, Sir Samuel Cunard, was born in Nova Scotia in 1787, and came to England in 1838. The Baronetcy was conferred on him in 1859 in recognition of the services he had rendered the country by the establishment of the famous Cunard Line of steamers. The description of Nevill Holt and its woods belongs to another chapter. Here we must end with the resignation of Sir Bache Cunard, and the acceptance of the Mastership of the Hunt, in accordance with the unanimous wish of the Committee, by Mr. C. W. B. Fernie.

PART III

THE FERNIE HUNT

CHAPTER I

FERNIE OF KEYTHORPE

"Cunard is to be succeeded by Fernie of Keythorpe, who will I think be very popular as M.F.H."—W. W. TAILBY.

THE man who gave his name to the country and the Hunt—Mr. Charles Witherington Bruce Fernie—may well become almost a legendary figure for future generations. It is already easier to compile a biography of Boothby or Meynell than to write even a brief memoir of the third Master of the Billesdon Hunt. His modesty and self-effacement made the task impossible during his lifetime (Mr. Costobadie's attempt ended in the quotation of a few lines from "Who's Who"), and after his death the material for such a memoir is almost entirely confined to the accounts of runs in the Press.

Mr. Fernie was Master of the Hunt from 1888 till his death in 1919, though in 1907 he had a bad fall from the effects of which he never completely recovered. The same year, his first huntsman, Charles Isaac, retired and Arthur Thatcher took the horn; the Master was generally out, but his activities in the field were limited. After his death Mrs. Fernie carried on the country till the end of the season, and in the following year was appointed Master: at the same time the Hunt was given the name of the Fernie as a memorial to the man who had served it for thirty years. Mrs. Fernie retained the Mastership till 1923, with Mrs. Faber as Joint Master for one season, and on her resignation, Lord Stalbridge was unanimously elected at a largely attended meeting of the subscribers, farmers and covert owners of the Fernie Hunt.

But though the materials for a memoir of Mr. Fernie are scanty, his memory lives in the countryside, and his generosity and kindness will never be forgotten. His generosity was almost a fault, but it endeared him to all who knew him. No Master of Hounds was ever so well loved or left so enduring a memorial in the hearts of the villagers and farmers whose country he hunted. His long tenancy of Keythorpe Hall, which was sold after his

death, carried on the traditions of Keythorpe as a famous meet of hounds. Here, during Lord Berner's residence, the Hunt was liberally entertained and before Fernie became Master—in the early days of his tenancy—Sir Bache Cunard's hounds used regularly to meet before the grey stone mansion above the Keythorpe Woods. His near neighbour, Tailby, believed in " Fernie of Keythorpe " from the first, and he was already known as a great sportsman devoted to hunting, a regular follower of Cunard's hounds in the 'eighties. Fernie was one of the committee that collected subscriptions for a testimonial to Sir Bache Cunard at the time of his resignation, when a silver model of a fox killed near the Ashlands was presented to the retiring Master. At a dinner held in the Corn Exchange, Market Harborough, on November 1st, 1888, to celebrate the presentation, Sir Bache Cunard, replying to the toast of his health, ended his speech with expressions of regret that he was leaving the Hunt—the average tenure of Mastership being then sixteen years—and with the hope that Mr. Fernie would not only keep up the average, but increase it. The toast of " The New Master " was drunk with enthusiasm, and Mr. Fernie responded in " felicitous terms." *

Keythorpe Hall, like Skeffington Hall, stands on an eminence overlooking the Fernie Saturday country. Immediately below it is the village of Goadby, while away to the south-east in the valley lie Hallaton and Horninghold. The Hall is backed by its fine woods, extending eastward to Ram's Head Spinney. Keythorpe Wood itself is close to Goadby, with the Hallaton Spinneys east of it, and Moor Hill beyond flanking the Hallaton road ; across the valley beyond Blaston rises the high ground on which stands Slawston Mill, and further east are the woods of Nevill Holt. Close to Keythorpe on the north-west is the village of Tugby in the hundred of East Goscote, Keythorpe being in Tugby parish, almost on the boundary between the hundreds of East Goscote and Gartree. In his Directory of Leicester and Rutland, White states that Keythorpe Hall was built in 1843, of stone from Tilton quarry, Lord Berners being then Lord of the Manor. There was, however, a much older mansion ; Keythorpe was the residence of the Skipwiths in the time of Queen Elizabeth, and a century later of the Wilsons, the family of which Lord Berners was the head. The Keythorpe estate was owned by the Hon. Sir Raymond T. Tyrwhite-Wilson, Bart., until its sale in 1919, after Mr. Fernie's death. Mrs. Fernie, who is a daughter of the late Mr. Thomas Hardcastle of Blaston Hall, now resides at Blaston.

The grey and rather sombre frontage of Keythorpe Hall, seen from the

* Costobadie, " Annals of the Billesdon Hunt."

Sempstress *Gainful* *Saucy* *Toilet* *Secret* *Tranquil*

SOME OF THE FERNIE BITCH PACK

Hallaton road, stands out from the dark woods behind it, the green slopes of the park descending to the road. Beyond the woods the Leicester–Uppingham turnpike (the boundary between the Fernie and Cottesmore countries) runs from Skeffington past Tugby and Keythorpe to East Norton, thereafter crossing the River Eye at Finchley Bridge, on the border of Leicestershire and Rutland. There is a fine memorial screen to Mr. Fernie, erected by the subscribers, farmers and covert owners of the Hunt, in Tugby Church.

One cannot but regret that there is no diary available as a record of the brilliant seasons that followed the appointment of the new Master, written by his own hand. The pages of a hunting diary bring to life past runs in a way that records in the Press can never do.* Perhaps it is the written rather than the printed page that gives life to what is after all a bare record of the line followed on each occasion, but the brevity of a hunting diary is half its charm, and there is a feeling for style even in the slightest touches of a journal such as Tailby's—the personal note is always there. Fortunately Tailby has recorded the earlier years of Fernie's Mastership, though he was not always out with the Fernie hounds. The quotation of entries from his journal after he had ceased to be Master would not, however, convey the vivid impressions given by the accounts of his own runs. His fourth volume is, nevertheless, full of interest, and many details can be gathered from it which are not available elsewhere.

The first fixture was at Saddington on November 5th, 1888. Tailby writes: "Commenced to-day under a new *régime*—Fernie M.F.H., Isaac huntsman—all looking very smart and well." A gallop of an hour and twenty-five minutes followed a find in Gumley Wood, after "only a badger" had been disturbed in Gumley Gorse. This first run ended at Foxton, where hounds lost. Several runs at the beginning of Fernie's first season are described by Tailby as very slow; hunting was much interfered with by fog and scent seems to have been bad. Fog was followed by a hard frost lasting three days. The weather improving, however, there was a good day after a meet at Burton Overy, the first run, past the Coplow, ending at Baggrave, when hounds returned and drew Norton Gorse, having a fast run through the Strettons to Glenn. Kills, however, were few so far, and hounds frequently changed foxes. Tailby complains at this time of lumbago, which kept him from hunting for several days. Fog and frost set in again and the year ended without any

* Although in later years the Hunt has been very fortunate in having as its chronicler Captain H. S. Macpherson, whose spirited accounts of recent runs are familiar to followers of the Fernie to-day.

remarkable run. There was a good hunt of over two hours on January 25th from Keythorpe to Harringworth Station, through Medbourne and Holt Wood, by Great Easton Park, Lyddington and Gretton, hounds killing close to the railway; but a few days later, after a meet at the 12th Milestone, Tailby remarks that the country was over-hunted. Snow and frost followed until well into February, when the average of good runs improved, and there were some very fast forty-minute gallops, especially one from Sheepthorns to the Laughton Hills. Tailby sums up the season as "good altogether, though not characterised by any special runs. Fernie and his new huntsman Isaac have done very well, killed nearly thirty brace of foxes and generally shown good sport. The country has been a little over-hunted and consequently the Monday side short of foxes, but that may be remedied another year."

When Charles Isaac was appointed huntsman he had been with the Pytchley thirteen years, first as 2nd whip and afterwards as 1st whip. He was born in Cornwall, where his father hunted a pack of harriers for "a local squire." Isaac got his first impressions of hunting on the Cornish moors and over the valleys, where the small fields are enclosed by walls and banks that require a bold horse; but he went to Devonshire as a boy, where he was employed by a horse-dealer, and afterwards to the Rufford Kennels; therefore his memories of Cornwall are very early ones. He rode in a steeplechase at the age of fourteen. Whether or not his proficiency as a rider at that age was acquired by taking part in the rough-and-ready cross-country races which take place every spring in West Cornwall, he showed remarkable ability from the first. His wonderful knowledge of woodcraft may also be the result of his Cornish upbringing, for anyone who has spent his youth on the Cornish hills has had ample opportunities for studying the ways of the fox in a truly wild country.

Charles Isaac likes to tell how, in 1874, he saw Custance win the Derby on George Frederick, Apology win the Oaks, and Maria Stewart the St. Leger. Of his own performances in the saddle, he is proudest of having jumped the Carlton Brook from the direction of Burton Overy (with the rail on the far side) on a grey horse called Valentine—a performance in which he has had no rivals.

The scarcity of foxes in the Monday country, mentioned by Tailby, was in part due to the bad state of the coverts and the fact that there were not enough of them. One of the first cares of the new Master was the renovation of the old coverts and the planting of new ones, in which he was ably assisted by Isaac. Mowsley Covert in the Monday country was made in 1889, the

ground being drilled with gorse seed. The covert was intended as a second draw to Bosworth Gorse, which in Fernie's first season hardly ever held foxes. In the Thursday country, among others, Sir Bache Cunard's new covert at Thurnby was enlarged, and in part of it blackthorn was planted. But the most important addition to the Thursday country was in the field by the Ashlands Spinney, where another new covert was laid out, though this was rather later. A quick fence was run up the field to the grass ride at the top, and about four acres were planted with blackthorn and privet, joining on to

TAMBORO HILL.

the original spinney planted by Mr. Burroughs. The rest of the ground enclosed was drilled with gorse, the whole being about eight acres. The cost of making this covert was £60. When it was done the question of naming it arose. The spinney and plantation near it had always been known as Ashlands, but it was not desired to identify the new covert with the Ashlands property. The name of the field in which it was planted solved the difficulty, and Isaac himself christened the new covert Tamboro Hill.

Three cubs were put into an artificial earth in the covert, and it was drawn the next season. For ten years afterwards Tamboro Hill was never drawn blank, though it was visited regularly twice a week.

If the condition of the coverts was bad in the Monday and Thursday countries, it was worse in the Saturday country. Watson's Gorse, according to Isaac, " was gone to rack and ruin." A quick fence was planted round it as the first step towards renovation. Then part of the ground (which was almost barren of gorse before it was planted) was cultivated with potatoes, another long strip being sown with wheat. The wheat crop was very successful, seventeen sacks being sold for £12, thus helping to defray the cost of renovation. Another covert taken in hand was Skevington's * Gorse. This had been in existence when the Quorn hunted the country, but had been little used for many years, and was no good at all in Sir Bache Cunard's time. Permission was obtained from the owner, Mrs. Price Dent, to enclose it, and following the method that was successful at Watson's Gorse, the dormant gorse seed was encouraged by cultivating the ground.

The season 1889–90 again opened with a meet at Saddington, after satisfactory cub-hunting, foxes being plentiful round Keythorpe and Rolleston, and also on Langton Caudle. Early in January there was a very good run—a twelve-mile point from Bosworth Gorse, over the canal by Theddingworth, over the Hothorpe Hills, through Marston Wood, and nearly to Sibbertoft, then back to Marston Wood and on by Clipston Mill and Farndon to Waterloo Gorse, hounds going on with a fresh fox by Desborough, and killing at Rushton. A fine run of an hour and a half from Norton Gorse to Holt and Great Easton was followed shortly afterwards by a very fast forty-five minutes from Rolleston ending in a kill between John O' Gaunt and Lowesby, which Tailby describes as the best run since Fernie took the hounds. Tailby writes in April :

" We have had a good season with Fernie—plenty of foxes, a good and improving huntsman, and a keen Master, who will go on I hope for many years." Commenting on other packs with which he had been out, Tailby concludes : " The Cottesmore have not been lucky in killing their foxes, though they were very plentiful, especially in Tilton, Skeffington and Loddington Woods. Gilson is rather slow, though quiet and a fine horseman—I think he will do better another year. The Quorn, I hear, have done well but I have only seen them twice. The Belvoir have had a bad season—no Master in the field and a worn-out huntsman,† though the hounds look as beautiful and no doubt are as good as ever."

* The old spelling of Skeffington survives in the name of this covert.

† A Field Master was shortly afterwards appointed by the seventh Duke of Rutland to relieve Gillard, who had acted as Master and huntsman for the sixth Duke, who died in 1888.

The good sport shown by Fernie's hounds was continued the next season, though owing to wet weather the cub-hunting was bad everywhere, and six weeks of the season were lost after the beginning of December through an unbroken period of hard frost. The opening meet in 1890 was at Gumley Hall and the first draw was Gumley Wood, thus inaugurating a now time-honoured custom; the Fernie Hunt has always held its opening meet at Gumley since that day, usually on the first Monday in November. For a year or two the fields were small, but as early as 1893 Tailby writes of the first day of the season, "the usual meet and the usual crowd." Fernie's hounds were attracting fields that rivalled those of Tailby's great seasons—the drive in front of Gumley Hall was gay with scarlet. Looking across the green lawn, between the formal plantations, which were laid out in imitation of St. Cloud by Mr. Joseph Cradock in the days of Meynell, the crowd of horsemen could be seen passing along the road in front of the Hall to draw Gumley Covert and Gumley Wood, with the crest of the Laughton Hills beyond them on the far side of the valley. The run which followed the first opening meet at Gumley was brief: hounds left the wood in full cry, a fox heading at once for the canal, where he was unfortunately drowned. From Holloway Spinney a second fox went away for Laughton, Mowsley and Saddington, when he was killed on the Gumley road. After the long frost and a heavy snowfall, there were some very good days in February. Thurnby Covert provided the stoutest fox of the year, the hero of a very fast fifty minutes to Ingarsby and back by Norton, Gaulby and Frisby, through Billesdon to the Ashlands and Noseley, where hounds changed foxes. There were more foxes in the Monday country, and Bosworth Gorse was seldom drawn blank this season. It is curious that there is no mention in Tailby's diary at this time of the new Mowsley Covert, perhaps because Bosworth Gorse generally held a fox and the alternative covert was not drawn.

One of Tailby's entries is very brief—he was out with the Cottesmore: "Ran from Owston to Launde, found at Prior's Coppice—broke my collar-bone in a drain—finis!"*

The entry was written on the same day, March 17th, and is almost illegible, but he was out again on April 9th, "with my arm in a sling and trussed like a partridge." He was then sixty-six, and this is the first of his later series of bad falls! The earlier series was when he was hunting with Sir Bache Cunard.

Fernie's were showing great sport the following season. In fact, the number of good runs was steadily increasing, and Tailby took part in two of

* See facsimile on page 61.

the longest. The first was from Langton Caudle in December. Hounds killed near the old Houghton Toll Bar, after running by Church Langton and Tur Langton, Shangton Holt, Noseley, Rolleston and Frisby, and finally along the Billesdon Brook nearly to Houghton. The record of the second run is worth quoting in full :

March 24th, 1892—*Billesdon*. Found in Thurnby Gorse—ran almost to the turnpike, where he was headed, then by Houghton, Norton Gorse, through Gaulby Spinneys up to Ashlands and Illston—went to a holloa near Pateman's farm, ran through Shangton Spinney, through Noseley Wood to Rolleston, down to the Vale, over my farm and up to Skeffington, then bore to the left and up to the Coplow—1 hour and 45 minutes—changed foxes, ran on to Scraptoft and Muck Hill Spinney, back to Scraptoft and lost. The run of the season—horses all beat—I rode Roscommon.

A fortnight later, during another fast run from the Caudle, Tailby's horse Tipperary pecked and threw him, putting its foot on his leg and breaking it near the ankle in two places. His comment at the end of the season is naturally rather despondent, for in spite of many fine runs he says : " This concludes the worst hunting season in my memory—more frost (eleven days), the country at first too blind to ride, at last too hard—swarming with foxes in both Fernie's and the Cottesmore countries, but they couldn't catch 'em ! "

The season 1892–93 was a disappointing one owing to weather (a month of severe frost followed by a very early spring which put an end to hunting a fortnight before the usual time) and also to a great abundance of foxes, particularly in the neighbourhood of Rolleston and Shangton Holt, so that many runs were spoilt by constantly changing foxes and the total of kills was less than usual. It was also a time of agricultural depression, which affected the incomes of many people who hunted ; Tailby himself sold four of his horses on this account. The best part of the season was the cub-hunting, but in spite of a great number of kills, the foxes were far too numerous at the end of it. The next season was much better and there was a very big opening meet at Gumley. On March 1st, 1894, occurred the run, previously mentioned, when the Hunt crossed the Leicester racecourse, of which Tailby gives a brief account. The meet was at Little Stretton :

" Found in Glenn Gorse, ran a ring by Oadby and back to Glenn, away again for Wigston and Knighton, and on to the racecourse where Leicester races were going on, over part of the course, back to Glenn village, and lost.

Vincent *Vandyke* *Warden* *Tarquin*

SOME OF THE FERNIE DOG PACK

Found again at Glenn Gorse, ran again by Wigston and Knighton, on to the racecourse and past the grand-stand just as the races were going to start, received with loud cheers and 'view holloas' and lost the fox at Stoughton."

The total of kills this season was seventy-four. Fernie's hounds were hunted part of the time by the 1st whip, Isaac having had a bad fall and broken his leg. It was a very dry season and there were a great many falls, some serious, owing to the hard ground. The year 1895 started with a ten-weeks' frost and there was only half a season's hunting. Just before the frost began Tailby had his worst fall: "This has been to me the shortest season during my hunting career, on Dec. 31st, 1894, a young mare reared with me at a gate, fell back, and broke my thigh, for which I was confined to my bed on my back for 12 weeks, and how many more I shall be condemned to inactivity or crutches no one can tell—I had had one bad fall before and put out my shoulder, so that it has been an unlucky season for me and will I fear be my last." Far from it—Tailby's journal still remains the best record of sport with Fernie's hounds for the next ten years.

1895–96 was a very open season, and there was a good average of runs. Charles Isaac was laid up for a great part of this season, his place being taken by Arthur Thatcher, who, having come as 2nd whip in 1890, had been promoted to 1st whip in 1895. "For a novice," says Tailby, "he did his work well." Three years later Thatcher went as huntsman to the Essex Union, and in 1900 to the Cottesmore, returning as huntsman to the Fernie on Isaac's retirement in 1907.

As season follows season in the 'nineties—some good, some bad, but all providing a fair number of good runs in a much improved country—there is little that calls for special comment in Tailby's diary or in the Press records of the time. Short-running foxes are Tailby's main complaint (largely because of the great number of foxes which seem to have been steadily increasing); at the end of the season 1898–99 Tailby records that Fernie's hounds had killed more foxes than ever before in one season in that country. On account of their abundance there were a number of bye-days, chiefly in the Thursday country—the New Inn Spinneys and the coverts of Rolleston and Noseley being especially frequent draws. Fernie was now hunting regularly twice a week, with alternate Saturdays, making five days a fortnight, in addition to more or less regular bye-days. Monday's meet was, as always, in what Dale calls "That delightful little bit of country" south of the Leicester-Harborough turnpike. Tuesday was rather in the nature of a bye-day,

though a frequent one, in the country close to Leicester,* Blaby Osiers being a covert much drawn. What was, however, regarded as a Tuesday country was as rapidly diminishing as the suburbs of Leicester were increasing. The Fernie Thursdays were as famous as Tailby's Thursdays had been, and the Thursday fixtures still drew the largest crowds. The Friday bye-days were always within easy reach of Harborough, generally at

A FAMOUS SATURDAY MEET: STOCKERSTON CROSS-ROADS.

Slawston, Noseley or Rolleston. These bye-days became the alternate Fridays as hunted to-day in the Friday–Saturday country; by the beginning of 1900 they had ceased to be bye-days, although the Friday meets were often in the Thursday country. Thus was part of Tailby's old country being gradually developed and the meets arranged so as to afford at least three days' hunting a week without being overhunted, and before the nineteenth century was

* The small strip of Quorn country south-west of Leicester, from Blaby to Kirby Muxloe, not hunted now, was lent to the Fernie at this time.

ended, the complaint was rather of too many foxes than too few, testifying to the wonderful way in which the country had been adapted to what was required of it by the Master and his huntsman, Charles Isaac. Dale writes of Fernie's hounds in 1903 :

" Mr. Fernie's country lies entirely in Leicestershire. The kennels are at Medbourne, a pretty village on the Welland, but in the extreme corner of the county and of the Hunt. They have about sixty couple of hounds in kennels, a charming pack with the true make, the good loins, the hocks near the ground and the beautiful necks and shoulders which enable them to gallop all day without tiring up and down the hills of their country, and to travel at a pace which is surpassed by no other pack of our time."

CHAPTER II

SOME GREAT RUNS

"During its existence as a separate Hunt, now close upon seventy years, the Fernie Hunt has been known by many names, the Billesdon, the South Quorn, Mr. Tailby's, Sir Bache Cunard's and Mr. Fernie's, until at last it seems to have settled down as the Fernie Hunt."—W. Scarth-Dixon.

IN spite of having been called by so many names, the Hunt was known officially as the Billesdon until it was given the title of the Fernie in 1919. The Hunt buttons, with the letters B.H., remained unaltered until about 1903, but some time after that date they were changed and the letter F was substituted. The name South Quorn was adopted when Mr. Richard Sutton hunted the country, and was occasionally used afterwards by writers referring to the Billesdon Hunt. The Hunt was officially known as the Billesdon up to the end of the nineteenth century and after, but for the first two decades of the twentieth century it was generally spoken of as Mr. Fernie's. Dale writes of it under this name in 1903, in his "Fox Hunting in the Shires," though noting that the letters B.H. were still retained on the Hunt buttons.* It has often been said that to ride well with the Fernie is a distinction to which many aspire, but only the elect attain. Dale gives the reason in a paragraph:

"In spite of its advantages, however, Mr. Fernie's fixtures are not overcrowded, for the truth is that to ride to hounds fairly straight is beyond the power of all save a few. Those who would do so must have nerve unshaken and big, bold blood horses, for the fences are serious obstacles, and it might well happen that during a run many, possibly most, of the fences will be such that they can just be jumped and no more. This is not only a test of nerve in the rider but of staying power in the horse, since big fences take more out of them than galloping. Inasmuch, then, as the reason for choosing such a country is that you wish to ride hard (for, as I have previously pointed out, if you do not desire this there are other countries than Leicestershire which

* On the other hand, Charles Isaac states that the buttons were changed when Fernie took the hounds, the explanation being that the older members of the Hunt retained the original buttons.

would suit you better), two horses a day are a necessity or you must make up your mind to forgo a great deal of the best sport. There are seasons (1901–2 was one) during which hounds will often run better in the evening than in the morning, and it is certain that there are many days in each season when they will do so. But before their afternoon runs begin the man with one horse ought to be well on his way home."

True as these words are, it is, nevertheless, a fact that Tailby saw many long days to a finish on one horse. His diary is indisputable evidence of this, because he often gives the names of the horses he rode on different days, and very rarely during his own Mastership is more than one horse mentioned. Later on he always had two or three horses out, but this was a luxury he indulged in in his old age; his very light weight made it possible for him to ride one horse when most men would have been obliged to change horses or go home. On one occasion, at least, Tailby changed horses, but this was the result of good fortune rather than intention. During a very hard run he galloped towards his own stables—the line leading by Skeffington—blowing his horn vigorously; a fresh horse was ready for him in the stable-yard as he passed. It is possible that he did have second horses out, though the fact is not mentioned in the earlier volumes of the diary, but it is certain that he rode some of his longest runs on one. The number of horses "knocked out" during a season also proves this, as do the occasions—fortunately few—when the mount that had carried him or one of his Hunt servants to the end of the day "stretched his stiff limbs to rise no more."

To return to the history of the Hunt after the close of the nineteenth century, the abundance of foxes resulted in heavy claims from farmers, which were met by Fernie in a manner almost too generous. He was, in fact, imposed upon, especially by one farmer, of whom an amusing story is told. He first presented a claim for poultry, and this was duly paid. Then the foxes were said to be marauding sheep, and compensation for a lamb was claimed. This also was paid. Growing bold, the farmer claimed for the loss of a calf. The Master then came to see him, settled the claim, and remarked with a twinkle in his eye, that he was very sorry, but hoped the fox would not take the cow as well!

Mr. Thomas Smith, in his excellent "Diary of a Huntsman," published in 1838, points out how necessary it is to prove the truth of such claims. He instances a case that came before him, where a fox was blamed for taking young lambs, and the farmer, being dissatisfied with the work of Smith's hounds, at last set a trap and caught his own setter—afterwards admitting

his mistake. The loss of lambs immediately ceased. Foxes were often blamed unjustly, especially some years ago, when certain dogs preyed not only upon lambs, but also upon sheep, running wild and proving as destructive as wolves. A paragraph in *The Leicester Journal* in March, 1825, describes a particularly bad instance, when two dogs established a reign of terror round Leicester :

" We had fully anticipated, that as the nights became lighter in consequence of the increasing age of the moon, a discovery would be made which would check the rapacity of these canine marauders, who have committed such devastation in the neighbourhood of this town : instead, however, of the evil complained of diminishing, it appears to increase most alarmingly. On Friday last thirteen sheep were compelled to be slaughtered which had been worried during the preceding night, near the Spinney Hills, and on Monday evening, or early on Tuesday morning last, the greatest havoc which has yet occurred took place. Sixty sheep, the property of Mr. Wright of Halstead, were grazing in the lordship of Knighton, when they were attacked and worried to such a degree, that thirty, including four actually destroyed on the ground, have been consigned to the knife, with every prospect of several more of them sharing a similar fate. Two dogs were seen early on the morning in question going down Stoughton Lane, and from their bloody appearance had no doubt just quitted the scene of slaughter. By the description given, we understand one is a liver coloured mongrel, and the other something of the lurcher. We hope their progress will be arrested before any more mischief ensues ; in the meantime too much precaution cannot be taken on the part of Graziers."

The first seasons of 1900 provided excellent sport with Fernie's hounds, though hard winters were frequent, when hunting was stopped for weeks at a time by frost and snow. Press notices of the runs are eloquent of the large fields that attended the meets—here is one for December 18th, 1902 ; the meet was at Little Stretton : " When huntsman Isaac arrived on the scene with the hounds there was a large muster of sportsmen in the saddle, and the carriage people were largely represented. Among those present were Mr. Fernie (the Master) and Mrs. Fernie, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Cunard, Miss Douglas, Mrs. Flude, Captain Warner, Mr. Kennard, the Misses Logan, Captain and Mrs. Lawson, Mr. Watts, Mr. Tailby, Mr. E. P. Steeds, Mr. Hames, Mrs. Bankart, Mr. Sedgeley, Mr. Lyon, Mr. and Mrs. Mark Firth, Sir Humphrey de Trafford, Mr. and Mrs. Bentley, Colonel Chaplin, Mr. Perkins, Mr. W. Colton, Mr. George Wilson, Mrs. Clayton, Mr. J. G. Parr and Mr. Chamberlain, etc."

Of this season Tailby writes : " Foxes have been plentiful, but very bad, many of them mangy, and none of them knowing any direct line." This passage is typical of many that follow in his entries for the next few seasons, but as they refer to both the Cottesmore and the Fernie countries, they suggest that conditions were the same everywhere. However this may be, the bad-running foxes seem gradually to have been weeded out—Isaac's last years with the Fernie are notable for the high average of good runs and the number

JOHN BALL.

of foxes killed. Meanwhile, Thatcher was making a name for himself with the Cottesmore, and in the spring of 1907 it was rumoured that he was coming as huntsman to the Fernie the next season. For nearly twenty years Charles Isaac had devoted himself to the country under Mr. Fernie's guidance, and its future fame was largely due to his untiring efforts towards the improvement of the coverts. Isaac may, indeed, be said to have made the country what it is to-day. If conditions were difficult at first, he overcame them, and the country as he left it in 1907 was entering on one of the most brilliant periods of sport it had ever known ; for from 1907 there began a series of great

runs that made Fernie's hounds as famous as Tailby's had been before them. Unfortunately the Master, whose work had been so untiring, and who had himself ridden to hounds with an enthusiasm only equalled by Tailby, met with a serious fall soon after Thatcher became huntsman, and, though his keenness in no way abated, his accident prevented him from enjoying a great deal of the sport that was to come.

When hounds were running from John Ball in October, 1907, Fernie, who was riding a young horse at the beginning of the season, put it at a difficult fence, and after several refusals the horse came down heavily and rolled on its rider. Those who were out at the time thought that the Master had been killed, but happily he recovered, though he was only able to attend the meets in his car for some time to come.

The pages of Tailby's journal, to which we shall soon have to say farewell, still give us a running commentary as season after season slips away; he has followed the fortunes of Fernie's hounds with an almost fatherly interest for eighteen seasons—his records growing briefer (though at times written with all the enthusiasm of his earlier years), and their continuity being often broken through his absence from the field owing to a fall or ill-health.

"*Eheu! fugaces labuntur anni*—It does not require these old Horatian lines to remind me of the briefest cub-hunting I have seen since 1856, the initiation of my Mastership," he writes in 1906. "I feel that I am no longer equal to the jogging about even on a hack—I hear Fernie has found plenty of foxes, but there have been no particular runs, the ground up to November was as hard as iron and consequently there was little scent." And at the end of the same season he says: "There were plenty of foxes but they could make no points, plenty of them were killed and hounds did their work well. I think the Cottesmore had altogether the best sport under their quick huntsman Thatcher, who next year is to go as huntsman to Fernie. The Quorn I have not been out with as I have been unable to ride so far. An immense number of ladies have been hunting this year, especially with the Cottesmore, whose Master, Mr. Hanbury, retires this year to be succeeded by Lord Lonsdale. The greatest nuisance attaching to all the hunts has been the motor cars, which frighten the horses to death, and leave behind them a stink of petroleum! and dust enough to blind the senses of all followers—Fare thee well, my friends, and believe in the good wishes of one who has hunted in this country since 1845—*Vale!*"

Yet though Tailby wrote some time before "that it will be my last season is confirmed by my inability to grasp the saddle and to bear the shock of

galloping," the following page describes runs in which he took part in March 1908. It might have been written in his prime:

Mar. 10th—Keythorpe. By permission of the Cottesmore Fernie had a day in this country—found at Loddington Reddish, ran by Tilton Wood by the gravel pits, over Robin-a-Tiptoe, back to the Reddish, by Tryon's Spinney, again to the Reddish, through Tugby Wood to Brown's Wood, where they chopped a fresh fox—stormy day.

Mar. 12th—Slawston. Found in the Caudle, 3 foxes, ran one as if for Laughton, back to the Caudle by Dent's Spinney and Cranoe, and killed him on the Cranoe road. Found again in Stonton Wood, ran by Glooston, back to Stonton, and lost.

Mar. 17th—Loddington. Found in the Reddish—ran by the mill, over the turnpike, leaving Ram's Head on the left, over the railway under Vowe's Gorse and up to Horninghold by Cross's House; after going as if for Stockerston Wood, through Horninghold Spinneys as if for Fearn Farm, along by Hallaton Bottoms and up almost to Ram's Head—very good gallop.

The journal continues for two more seasons, but there is only one entry for the season 1909–10. This entry is the last that Tailby wrote, and it is characteristic of the spirit that pervades the records of his closing years. His enthusiasm never wanes, there is nothing morbid in his regrets, though he bitterly laments his failing powers. Even at the end he does not forget to write in the margin the circles with a dot in the centre that he has used for fifty-four seasons to denote foxes run to ground. Facsimiles of the last two pages of the journal are given overleaf. On one will be noticed the lines, "Fernie will go on as before if his health allows, and we all sincerely hope it will." This is the only reference Tailby makes to the Master's bad fall in 1907.

The last three months of the season 1906–7 (Isaac's final season as huntsman) saw some very fine runs and the meets were attended by enormous fields. Whatever Tailby had to say about short-running foxes, they seem to have recovered themselves by the end of this season. On the first of January, 1907, a great fox (great in size and worthy of the distinction for stoutness as well) raced from Thurnby Covert for Houghton and the Quorn country, then turned for Norton Gorse; he went through the covert, and Isaac, guessing his intentions, laid hounds on the line beyond it, picking up a red-hot scent for Tamboro Hill. The fox swerved to the left by Billesdon, passing Botany

Ap: 12. 1910 – Alas my
hunting is over for ever – I have
tried to go to the Meets two or three
times when close to, but I was always
obliged to retire when they went
to draw – The season has been a
very wet one & very boisterous – I can
only speak of the sport from hearsay
but I think the season has been a
very bad one. Tho' there have been
abundance of foxes they never made
a good point & I have only heard of
two or three good days all the season –
There are the usual rumours of the
retirement of Masters but I expect
they will before next season be easily
replaced – The Cottesmore will I think
be in difficulties – Fernie will go
on as before if his health allows &
we all sincerely hope it will –
Good bye for ever my true friends.
& may you never forget the true joys
& health of fox-hunting [illegible] –

Hunting 1909 - 10

Crippled with gout & Wrecked
& heart disease combined with
old age (84 yrs) I did not
venture to cub hunt. But I
Nov: 1 engaged out this my first day
to Tilton with the Cottesmore -
They spoke of a liberal supply
of foxes all round, but owing
to the wet summer. The ground
was deeper than ever I remember -
found at Tilton Wood - ran to
ground at Red Hill - found again
at Tilton Wood: ran thro Skeffington
Wood & Burrough Wood to ground
at High Field - after which I
was home very tired —

Bay and Lord Morton's, and going clean away from hounds by Ingarsby. Here they were unable to get on the line and the gallop ended, one of the fastest in the annals of the Fernie. The pace over this stiff country emptied many saddles and only a much-reduced field were up at the end. A few days later, from John Ball, a fox made a point for Knaptoft, and after almost reaching the village, turned and recrossed the turnpike, gaining Mowsley Covert, which he left for the Laughton Hills with hounds following at a great pace. He ran the length of the hills, turned again, and finally raced back to John Ball, where hounds got on a fresh line and ran on for Walton Holt. Though the points were comparatively short in both these runs, the pace weeded out all but the best, and for this they are memorable. Old followers of the Hunt testify that they never saw hounds run so fast. When Arthur Thatcher took the horn at the beginning of the next season, however, distance was added to pace, and there were never stouter foxes in the country than the one that ran from Noseley to Baggrave on March 21st, 1908, or the fox (possibly two foxes) which led the hounds from Horninghold over the Cottesmore country on February 25th, 1911. This record run, known as the Horninghold run, ended in a kill near Braunston ; it is very doubtful whether the fox was changed.

The Noseley fox ran to Illston, over the Carlton Bottoms, then by Norton Gorse and King's Norton to the Coplow, where there was a short check under Botany Bay. The fox did not enter the covert, and after crossing the railway near Quenby, was viewed going in the direction of Baggrave. He was eventually lost in Baggrave Park. The big Thursday field, including members of the Pytchley, was thinned out in the first half-hour from Noseley, and those who reached the Coplow were glad to take advantage of the very brief respite.

There have been several accounts of the great Horninghold run. It was recorded as the run of the season in *Baily's Magazine* (April, 1911), and a good account of it is the narrative given in Mr. Costobadie's book, contributed by Mr. Mostyn Pritchard, who was one of the six who saw the finish. Both accounts are too long to quote in full, and the most interesting of all is Arthur Thatcher's own story of the run. Unfortunately no transcript can convey the quickness with which he tells it ; the pictures are presented as rapidly as the events followed each other on that memorable day. His story must be supplemented with other versions to form a continuous narrative.

The meet was at Horninghold, where Mr. Cross entertained the field. The contributor to *Baily's* writes :

" Thatcher had his bitch pack out. This pack is known for its quality and

pace, and has, I think, more music than of old. . . . Belvoir blood, in its best strains, is strongly represented by daughters Ragman, Warlaby, and Nailor, while the home-bred sire Somerset represents Belvoir Vagabond, a line for which Thatcher has always a liking."

It was a warm morning with light clouds and fleeting gleams of sun, when a large gathering assembled at Horninghold; they passed through the gates over the Hegg fields and hounds threw off in Hegg Spinney. "The Quorn had a great run yesterday," Thatcher remarked to Mr. Fernie, "I think we shall have a better to-day." The Master was hunting, as he always did after his accident, in a long drab riding coat; he generally remained for the first part of the day only. Almost at once hounds got on to the line of a fox in the spinney, but he doubled in covert and eluded them. Thatcher saw the fox come out on the other side; he stopped still and looked back—then off he went.

It seemed like a challenge, and quick as lightning Thatcher laid on the hounds. Mr. Fernie was close by the edge of the covert as they leaped through the boundary fence, owning the line with a chorus that brought everyone galloping from the far end near the Middle Hegg field. Hounds ran at racing pace as if for Stockerston, turned to the left and crossed the Eye Brook, hesitated a moment below Beaumont Chase, and then raced up the hill, skirting Wardley Wood. They crossed the turnpike and, still going very fast, reached the outskirts of Uppingham. Here the fox crouched under a wall, hounds leaping over him. Then up he jumped, right among them, and started on his great run. Heading for Bisbrooke and Glaston, just short of Glaston Wood he turned to the left, running by Brooke and nearly to Oakham Pastures. Mr. Mostyn Pritchard gives a racy description of his experiences while taking part in the run at this point:

"There is no time for a breather yet, for hounds have turned sharp to the left and there is the road and bottom ahead; a gate leads from the former and two more fences bring us down to the latter, where for the moment the bitches look like giving us the slip. A practicable place is quickly found, and Thatcher gives us the office over the rails and water, and then another mile of good going and easy fences brings us up to Preston. So far the pace has been good, and hounds have come along with hardly a check; they pause by the village, but Thatcher lifts them across the road to hunt more slowly down to the brook beyond; two nice fences and the bridge handy gives us a good place with the pack as they take up the running on the big pastures below Manton Gorse. That well-known covert affords no shelter for foxes

this year, and leaving it on the right, the bitches drive on over the grass as if they had only just started. 'Hullo! there's that belt of trees we see in Giles's picture.' We crawl in over the ruined wall, and jump out beyond, getting the worst of the turn as they swing right-handed over the brow, and come down to the Manton Brook at an ugly place; but there is no time to be lost when they run like this. Boore has his nippers out in a twinkling. 'It isn't a picture when you *have* cut the wire,' Massey suggests, and Thatcher, seeing the wisdom of the remark, jumps the fence to the left, and crossing higher up joins his hounds as they set their helm for Orton Park Wood, three good miles ahead. Here's a picture for you now! I'll stake my hat you can't beat this! Eighteen couple of those fleet little ladies racing ahead; plenty of room to gallop and jump, the pink of Leicestershire before you, and fourteen good miles already behind. This may fall to your lot but once in a lifetime!"

Even Orton Park Wood did not delay the hounds. They raced through it, though here it is possible they changed foxes, or in Knossington Spinneys a few minutes later. There was a momentary breathing space before reaching Knossington, hounds turning as though for Lady Wood, when a holloa on the hill enabled Thatcher to lay them on the line for the Spinneys. First in the field at this point, besides two Hunt servants and Thatcher, were his son (who had a fall here, but remounted), Major Schofield, Captains Holland and Porter, and Messrs. Gough, Massey, Mason, Fletcher, Mawson, Gillilan and a few others, also the two Miss Maudslays and Miss Pritchard. These were immediately joined by Mrs. Fernie, Mrs. Fletcher, Mrs. Gough and Mrs. Mackenzie. A holloa from the 1st whip, Jack Boore, brought hounds on to the line of the hunted fox, which was viewed apparently beat, and was considered by those who had had a view earlier in the day to be the original fox. He headed for Cold Overton, turned, leaving the village on the left, ran a right-handed ring past Owston Wood, and then went straight for Marefield. Few second horses were available, and after breasting the hill towards Cold Overton, several of those who had reached Knossington reluctantly turned home. It is doubtful if anyone whose second horse had not come up was able to keep on, except Jack Boore, who rode his first horse to the end. Thatcher and Mr. Mostyn Pritchard both changed horses at Knossington.

Hounds ran the whole length of Owston Wood without entering it, and when they turned for Marefield there were only about twelve horses behind them, galloping all out over the grass for Burrough Hill. After a short check near the Somerby–Owston road, close to Peake's Covert, the fox doubled back

BIG FENCES NEAR NORTON GORSE

for Somerby. Here he was viewed, and hounds were in the same field with him close to the village. But a great storm blowing over darkened the landscape, and it seemed as though the fox had escaped them. He was again viewed, however, making for Orton Park Wood, when he turned, and hounds hunted more slowly almost to Braunston.

At last the hounds stopped and bayed in front of a stick-heap, close to which was a drain under a gateway; the hounds were at each end. A few moments later Thatcher saw three or four of them taking a line down a furrow. He was then standing on the stick-heap, having looked into the drain, which was open at both ends, and found no fox. Springing down from the stick-heap, he brought up the pack to the hounds feathering along the furrow, and they killed their fox dead beat.

Thatcher got a third horse, and on his arrival at Keythorpe found Mr. Fernie, who had left after the early part of the run, pacing round the billiard-room. "I'd have given you anything if you'd killed that fox," he said; "they tell me you *lost him*." Only six besides Thatcher and two Hunt servants had seen the end of the run, and these had not returned. Mr. Mostyn Pritchard, Mr. Gough, Mr. Greaves, Captain Porter, Captain Holland, and a farmer whose name is not recorded were up at the finish. Mr. Murray Smith joined them about ten minutes later. Jack Boore's horse died at Belton the same evening, having carried him through the whole run, and Thatcher's first horse never went out again. Otherwise, considering the distance and the pace, the condition of horses and hounds at the finish was wonderfully good.

The time of the run was three hours and twenty minutes; the total distance was about thirty miles, and the furthest point—just short of Peake's Covert—measures on the Ordnance Map a little under nine miles in a straight line from Horninghold.

One of the most remarkable runs that ever took place in the country occurred about this time; it might have become as famous as the Horninghold run, except that nobody was present to see the second half of it, the line of which remains a mystery, though the way it ended was known later.

After a dull morning round the Stockerston Woods, Thatcher suggested to Mr. Fernie that Skevington's Gorse should be drawn. As hounds went into the covert, a fox was holloa'd away by the 1st whip, who said it was the biggest fox he had ever seen. Hounds were put on to the line and went away by Blaston and Slawston, past the Manor House outside Hallaton, and straight for Keythorpe Wood. They did not enter the wood, but leaving Noseley on the left, ran through Rolleston Dingle, over the Skeffington Vale, past Skeffing-

ton Hall and across the turnpike; they passed Skeffington Wood and left Tilton village on the right. Mr. Gough and Thatcher galloped along the Tilton road towards the Coplow, but as hounds were heading for the Coplow and it was getting late, Thatcher tried to call them off. He could not stop them, however, and they turned towards Billesdon village, when just below the famous hill. Only four were up at this point, besides Thatcher and the 1st whip (who had a bad fall close to the Coplow): Mrs. Fernie, Miss Naylor (afterwards Mrs. Straker), the late Mr. Straker, and Mr. Gough. All the horses were beat, and by the time Billesdon was reached Thatcher was alone with the hounds. They did not slacken their pace for a moment, passing Billesdon and going on towards Tamboro Hill. Here Thatcher was obliged to pull up, his horse being completely done and refusing to jump a low fence out of a road. Thinking hounds had turned for Gaulby, he took the road and trotted into King's Norton.

It was now dark, but a man on a haystack near King's Norton had heard hounds go through Gaulby towards Houghton-on-the-Hill, and, as he thought, turn back towards Little Stretton. Thatcher had two couple of hounds with him. He walked back to Billesdon, leading his horse, tied the hounds together with string, and went on to Keythorpe to tell Mr. Fernie. Leaving the four hounds there, he took his horse home to Medbourne. In Medbourne a bitch, Violet, jumped off a wall and ran up to him. It was a Saturday night, and of the pack which was required for Monday, only five remained! No hounds came home that night. On Sunday Clarence, the 2nd whip, took a trap to fetch the four from Keythorpe. A few more returned to the kennels on Sunday night.

Meanwhile news came that Colonel Wood, returning to Leicester by train on Saturday evening, had heard hounds running in the dark near Knighton. On Monday morning fifteen couple were available for the Monday meet. Most of them had had no food since Friday, but they took part in a great run from Mowsley on Monday, killing in the earths near Peatling. Eventually all the hounds returned to the kennels except two, which went back to Mr. Cross's house at Horninghold, where they had been walked. There was still news of the sequel to come: hounds had killed their fox on Saturday evening in the Knighton Spinneys.

CHAPTER III

MONDAY COUNTRY

"John Ball covert, near Shearsby, is a very favourite fixture in the Harborough country. This covert was made under the direction of Mr. Oldacre, a most respectable yeoman, residing between Leicester and Melton."—NIMROD.

HAVING traced the history of the Harborough country up to the end of the first decade of the twentieth century; having seen it change from a gorse-grown common, or rather series of commons divided by boundary fences and broken by lands under the plough, to a strongly-fenced grazing country, almost every field of which has helped to make hunting history; and having taken the reader through so many great runs that he may be excused if he feels that his horse has begun to lean heavily on its bit, like poor Edwin in Nimrod's immortal description,* we must now make a tour of the country as it is to-day, before concluding the history of the Fernie Hunt.

The boundaries of the Fernie country are simple, following main roads or rivers, except for some slight deviations, chiefly to include neutral coverts. Apart from the coverts neutral to the Pytchley, the country is entirely in Leicestershire. The Fernie is the only Leicestershire Hunt of which this can be said, the Quorn including a considerable part of South Notts and a small corner of Derbyshire. The Hunt boundary coincides with the country boundary on the south and east: on the south it follows the River Welland which flows between Leicestershire and Northants, and on the east the River Eye, which is also the boundary for a few miles between Leicestershire and Rutland.

Starting from Leicester, southwards, the Hunt boundary practically follows the Lutterworth road as far as Ashby Magna, running through Aylestone, between Blaby and Whetstone, to Cosby Hill and Ashby, thence south-east to Gilmorton and Kimcote; from Kimcote it runs north-east to Walton and south-east to Walton Holt, then due south to North Kilworth Station and due east to Bosworth Gorse. The boundary then follows the Welland north-

* "Hunting Reminiscences," page 74, 1st ed.

east to Lubenham and Market Harborough; but De Trafford's Gorse, the Hothorpe and Marston Hills, and Marston Trussells, south of the Welland, are included as neutral draws with the Pytchley. From Market Harborough, the Welland is the boundary through Welham up to Rockingham Station; there the Cottesmore Eye * takes its place and the boundary follows this river north-west through Stockerston to Allexton. Allexton Wood was neutral to the Fernie and the Cottesmore until 1925, when it was purchased by the Fernie Hunt. The boundary then follows the Leicester–Uppingham turnpike through East Norton, Tugby, Billesdon, Houghton-on-the-Hill and Thurnby back to Leicester.

The Monday country is divided from the Thursday country by the Leicester–Harborough turnpike, and the Thursday from the alternate Friday–Saturday country by a line running from Keythorpe through Glooston and Stonton Wyville to Welham, though this boundary is less rigid than the other, some of the coverts being included as draws in both countries.

Physically, the Monday country is divided into two distinct areas, one north of the Knaptoft watershed and the other south and east of it. The area to the north is crossed by two streams flowing from the main watershed and some smaller streamlets: the first stream is the Whetstone Brook which rises on the western spar of the watershed near Peatling Parva, the second is the Countesthorpe Brook which rises on Knaptoft Hill close to John Ball Covert. The Whetstone Brook flows into the Soar after passing through the village of Whetstone; the Countesthorpe Brook joins the Sence, which is itself a tributary of the Soar, between South Wigston and Countesthorpe. The Sence rises near Billesdon Coplow, the western extremity of the great watershed in central Leicestershire which runs from the Coplow to Whadborough and Burrough Hills. It is joined by another stream rising near the village of Billesdon which gives its name to this part of the river, popularly known as the Billesdon Brook. The two streams united flow through Little Stretton and Glenn, being joined on their way by the Norton and Burton Brooks. Thus augmented the River Sence flows into the Monday country by Wistow and describes a loop which runs northward to join the Soar a mile west of Blaby. From Wistow to Blaby the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Union Canal runs alongside the river.

Returning to the Knaptoft watershed, the streams that flow south and east are diverted by the Gumley and Laughton Hills, the latter forming a

* The second river of this name in Leicestershire, variously called the Southern Eye, the Cottesmore Eye, or the Eye Brook.

barrier between the main watershed and the Valley of the Welland. The Saddington Brook joins the Welland between Thorpe Langton and Sutton Basset, and another small stream flows into the river by Theddingworth. On the west, the River Swift descends from the high ground to join the Avon near Rugby.

Knaptoft has been described as the main source of the Soar, the Avon, and the Welland, but it is more correct to say that it is the source of tributaries of these rivers. The Soar rises at Copston Magna, the Avon at Naseby, and the

WHETSTONE GORSE.

Welland at Sibbertoft. There is always a fascination in searching for the place that marks the parting of the waters, and at Knaptoft, as on the Tilton ridge, observers have claimed that such a place can be seen. However this may be, it is certain that all the streams having their source on this watershed rise within two miles of Knaptoft itself, some less than half a mile from the summit of the hill. The highest point near John Ball is five hundred and twenty feet, the ground sloping gradually on the north to the level of about two hundred feet in the valley of the Sence, the slope being furrowed by the two streams, the Whetstone and Countesthorpe Brooks.

We can now take this part of the Monday country in detail, dividing it for convenience into two areas, one west and the other east of the Welford road which crosses the watershed between the coverts John and Jane Ball. We will take the western area first.

Leaving Leicester by the Countesthorpe road through Aylestone and South Wigston, passing Glenn Parva Barracks, and turning to the right at the Canal, the first covert is the once famous Blaby Osier Beds.

Blaby Osiers was usually the first draw after a meet at Foston Cross-roads, and was seldom drawn blank. It has held foxes until the last few years, but now the extension of South Wigston and the allotments close to the covert make it impossible to hunt round it. The old Tuesday bye-day country beyond the Soar, lent to the Fernie by the Quorn, has also passed out of hunting history, and though the vicinity of the Osiers and the junction of the Soar and the Sence beyond Blaby still has a pastoral appearance, building is rapidly encroaching round the water meadows and quiet lanes. The road to Blaby village crosses the Sence and the canal. The village has been modernised; only a few of the old thatched cottages remain, and the picturesque yard of the "Baker's Arms."

The Lutterworth turnpike runs through Blaby, dividing the Fernie from the southern strip of Quorn country, and passing the village of Whetstone on the right and Countesthorpe a little further away on the left. The road from Countesthorpe to Cosby crosses the turnpike, and here Quorn country ends, the turnpike afterwards dividing the Fernie from the Atherstone. Close to the road on the right is Whetstone Grange, owned by Mr. W. H. Herbert, and Whetstone Plantation. Whetstone Gorse, also famous in the annals of the Hunt, lies by the farm of Whetstone Grange. This covert was once much larger, but its fame belongs to an older period than that of Blaby Osiers. Thatcher, who came to the Fernie as 2nd whipper-in thirty-five years ago, cannot remember a good hunt from it, though a fox was killed near the railway, which runs through the plantation, in the cubbing season of 1924. The "Gorse" is now a square enclosure containing a variety of small trees, including poplar, fir, ash and oak, with a thick tangle of grass and brambles; a hand-gate opens on to the old ride, along which the Hunt has not passed for many years.

A mile from Whetstone Gorse, on the right of the turnpike, is Major H. Robertson Aikman's covert, Dunton Basset. Through his courtesy the Fernie draw this covert several times in a season. Broughton Astley village lies just beyond it, looking across the Atherstone country. Away in the

valley on the left of the turnpike is Willoughby Waterless, the second word being not only an absurd misnomer, but a corruption of Waterleys. A *ley* is to pasture what a *land* is to arable, a subdivision of a field.* Thus in ploughing a field it is divided into lands according to the way it is ploughed, sometimes

THE POOL.

a furrow, sometimes a grass balk separating them; at the top and bottom a portion may be ploughed at right angles to the rest, termed a headland.

* In the old open-field system of agriculture, each tenant had a number of separate strips or *selions* scattered over the different fields. Each *selion* was divided from the next by a *balk* of unploughed land. The *headland* was the land on which the plough was turned round at the end of the *selions* (see Seebohm's "Village Community"). The word *ley* is often merely synonymous with meadow. There were various meadows called leys by the Soar in the old township of Leicester. Two of them were called the *lerols*, which seems to be a combination of *ley* and *rol* = a stream, *i.e.* a water meadow.

There may be two or more leys in a meadow. Now the beautiful little village of Willoughby lying among its rich water-leys has a name that suggests a desert. Yet view the village on a summer day; the square tower of its church rises among trees that have the sheen of silver, the wind is blowing the poplars and clouds chasing their shadows across this pleasant valley. The village is close to the junction of a small stream with the Whetstone Brook, the ground gradually ascending towards the watershed. Ashby Magna lies just ahead. A rough road to the left leads to Quarry Hole Spinney, close to Ashby Station. Foxes are frequently found here, and it is the usual draw after Major Aikman's covert on the way to Gilmorton.

The little Spinney is composed of ash and pine with young oaks, and on the left of the road which divides it there is a plantation of larches. The road leads through Ashby Magna and past the site of its ancient Hall, surrounded by a moat which still remains.

The country becomes more open as the ground rises, the Coplow appearing on the left, twelve miles away, and Carlton Clump, another landmark that helps to map out the land, rising above Sheepthorns in the Thursday country. The village of Peatling Parva is situated on the southern and steeper slope of the watershed. A turning to the left in the village leads to Little Peatling Hall, the residence of Colonel Gemmell, and to the Peatling Spinneys.

Through the valley in which lies this chain of spinneys flows a tributary of the Countesthorpe Brook, while on the other side of the road that runs past Little Peatling Hall is the source of the Whetstone Brook, which flows down the main valley past Willoughby. The Hall looks out over the smaller valley, and the first of the spinneys is a field away. The stream runs into a tree-shaded pool, with an island in the centre where wild duck nest. On a fine day in spring, when shafts of sunlight come through the trees, and through the tangle of nettles and hemlock surrounding the pool, a duck with a late brood may be seen swimming across to the island.

In winter the chain of spinneys forms a dark background to the scarlet and white of the Hunt drawn up in the big field above the ford, while hounds work slowly along the valley. There may be a stampede up the field for Peatling Covert to the north, or a rush downhill for the ford, if the fox takes a line east for Bruntingthorpe and John Ball.

In the opposite direction is Gilmorton and its famous covert on the southern boundary of the Fernie Hunt. Raids into the Atherstone or Pytchley countries may be expected from Gilmorton, to Bitteswell, Misterton or Kilworth, beyond the skyline where the spire of Gilmorton Church and the windmill with its

FERNIE COUNTRY NEAR THE COPLOW

one derelict sail are familiar landmarks, seen through the trees that border the ride.

Gilmorton Covert, formed of close-set thorn and ash, looks across to the Hemplow Hills, which can be seen in the blue distance beyond the village. A run into the Pytchley country follows a find at Gilmorton if the fox makes his point for Kilworth Sticks, about three miles away; or he may take a

THE RIDE, GILMORTON COVERT.

line for John and Jane Ball over a fine stretch of country, passing Shearsby—famous as the start of many great runs, from Shearsby Gorse, in the early days of the Quorn. On the other hand, the line may lead due west into the Atherstone country over level fields and fences that can be jumped anywhere. Gilmorton is not mentioned as a draw in the earlier volumes of Tailby's journal, only coming into prominence towards the end of Sir Bache Cunard's time; and it was probably, though there is no definite information available,

one of the coverts he renovated or enlarged from a smaller spinney. It was a frequent draw when Fernie took the hounds. Thatcher recalls a very long run in the cubbing season (he was 2nd whip to Charles Isaac at the time), which started from Gilmorton. All the cubs had apparently left the covert, hounds killing the last one; Thatcher had dismounted to get the carcass, when, before Isaac had time to throw it to the hounds, the 1st whip, Harry Kinch, holloa'd away another fox. Kinch remarked that it was the " biggest black fox he'd ever seen." The fox went away for Kilworth Sticks, through Stanford Park, to Lilbourne Station, where it ran on to the platform. Thatcher galloped along the road below the station and met the fox coming away followed by the hounds. Mr. Gordon Cunard and Thatcher jumped out of the road and found themselves alone with hounds. Hillmorton Covert was soon in sight and they viewed the fox coming out of it dead beat. He went under a gateway into a large shed, and the hounds began running riot in every direction; Hillmorton had not been drawn by the North Warwickshire, and was full of cubs. Thatcher stayed with a bitch, Fidget, which marked the fox by the shed. Fidget went into the shed and jumped up against a hay-rack, above which was a square opening for filling the rack from a barn adjoining. Thatcher looked through this opening and saw two eyes gleaming in the darkness. Someone suggested it was a cat, but Fidget remained quivering with excitement by the rack. Eventually Isaac brought up the hounds and they killed their fox.

Leaving Gilmorton by a grass road to the Welford turnpike on the way to John and Jane Ball, and entering the by-road to Shearsby, we pass on the right Shearsby Spa, one of the local springs which, unlike Holt Spa, is still used for medicinal purposes. These springs in Leicestershire were once famous, but Shearsby is the only one in this part of the country that keeps up its reputation. The Spa is a farm-house used as a small hotel and is still visited occasionally by people who want to take the waters. The village is on the left of the road, at the foot of the hill on which are the two famous coverts.

The naming of the coverts John and Jane Ball has long been a mystery. John Ball is on the far side of the Welford road and Jane Ball on the near side, approaching it from Shearsby.

There is no doubt when John Ball was planted. It is a covert made for Osbaldeston by Mr. Oldacre, a man skilled in making thorn coverts. Dale states that Jane Ball was also made by him, and Walton Holt. He is probably right about the last, for Oldacre made other coverts in the country, but with

regard to Jane Ball his statement is not borne out by Nimrod, nor by maps of the period, on which only John Ball is marked. Nimrod, after stating that John Ball was made by Oldacre, says :

" By his care in preparing and clearing the ground previously to the seed being drilled, and keeping the plants clean by the use of the hoe, they (his coverts) generally held foxes the second year ; and a handsome silver cup was presented to Mr. Oldacre for his exertion. In addition to this mark of approbation, some of the principal gentlemen of the Hunt attended the christening of one of his children and stood as sponsors." *

THE HUNTED FOX.

This paragraph suggests that the name John was given to the covert in honour of that occasion, and Ball may refer to the familiar term meaning to cake or gather in lumps, like snow on a horse's feet, which would be appropriate on account of the rounded summit of the hill on which the covert stands. The term was much used in Leicestershire,† as elsewhere. There is no record of any person of that name in connection with the covert. Whether Jane Ball was made later by Oldacre or whether it was an older covert renamed

* " Hunting Reminiscences," page 58, 1st ed.
† See Evans, " Leicestershire Words and Phrases."

to pair with its neighbour, we cannot tell. It is curious that Jane Ball is not mentioned by Nimrod, and that neither Jane Ball nor Shearsby Gorse is marked on Coombe's map of 1830, which only has John Ball. Tailby in his journal mentions John and Jane Ball in 1856, but never Shearsby Gorse, which was famous in Lord Suffield's time (1838–39). One might identify the latter covert with Jane Ball, except that, according to an account of a run given by Nimrod, Shearsby Gorse was nearer Fleckney and on the other side of the turnpike.

Gay in summer, with a carpet of willow herb spread among the thorn, and at a distance having the appearance of a patch of heather on the hill, John Ball is growing again after having been cleared two years ago. Jane Ball—a gorse-grown hillside—has also been recently renovated, and both coverts may be expected to hold foxes and to maintain their reputations as two of the best draws in the Monday country. From both there is a wide view : John Ball, east of the Welford turnpike, looking north towards the Coplow, and Jane Ball, west of it, looking across a wide stretch of country with such varied landmarks as the tower of Lutterworth Church, almost hidden among the trees, Kimcote Spire, Croft Hill, and finally, rising in the west, Bardon Hill and the range of Charnwood Forest.

The highest point of the watershed is here, where once a fine church, the Hall, and clustered houses stood beside the parting of the waters. Knaptoft Farm is on the summit of the hill near the ruined church, of which the doorway is all that remains. The church is supposed to have been burnt down after Naseby. Knaptoft was then a large village and the Hall was owned by a staunch Royalist, who was heavily fined and " obliged to fly to America." Foundations of many buildings, human bones, and other relics, have been found in digging round the church, the stones of which were removed more than a hundred years ago.

Over this hill, which lies in a direct line between Naseby and Leicester, came Rupert's discomfited dragoons—their horses wet after crossing the Welland wherever there was any possible ford—galloping from Sibbertoft to Theddingworth, labouring up the hill, passing through the village with scarcely strength to shout a warning, and vanishing in the haze of a June evening along the rough track by Arnesby Mill.

CHAPTER IV

MONDAY COUNTRY (*continued*)

PEATLING MAGNA AND WISTOW

"Peatling Magna, on the western acclivity of a pleasant valley watered by a small rivulet . . . on the rivulet here was formerly a *Fulling Mill*, to which cloth was brought on pack-horses from all the surrounding parishes."—W. WHITE.

THE Welford Turnpike descends from Knaptoft and leads straight to Leicester by Arnesby and Kilby. In the old days before the roads replaced them, pack-horse tracks led from one village to another. Some of these are traceable in the grass bridle-roads which are still the only means of reaching many of the Leicestershire coverts, notably Jericho Covert in the Belvoir country and Stonton Wood in the Fernie, the latter approached by the Old Gartree Road. Several such tracks, by which cloth was brought to the old fulling* mill there, lead to Peatling Magna. Our best way, however, of approaching the village and the country round it is to start from Leicester by the Welford turnpike.

After ascending the long hill to Wigston Magna, and following the road across the canal and the Sence at Kilby Bridge, we reach Foston village by a bridle-road crossing Foston Big Field. This hundred-acre field affords a splendid view over the outskirts of Leicester and the Leicester side of the Monday country, the ground here rising to about three hundred feet. The two steeples of Wigston are the nearest landmarks. Kilby Church is on the right in the valley of the Sence, which from here appears to be wooded owing to the number of hedgerow trees. Further away Tythorn Spinneys, south of Tythorn Hill, and the Canal Spinneys, follow the course of the canal and river as far as Wistow. Looking over the meadows, which were once only intersected by water-ways, the smoke of a train on the Midland Railway may now be seen floating like a white cloud near the locks of the canal at the foot of Tythorn Hill. The Countesthorpe Brook here flows between Foston and

* A process of thickening and scouring cloth.

Countesthorpe, and a road leads across the valley from Foston to the latter village, where the ground again rises to three hundred feet. Peatling Magna is in the valley, where a small stream from Peatling Parva joins the brook, a mile and a half from Foston. By Foston Church and Rectory and Foston Hall Farm, which compose the village, another field-road turns to the left for Great Peatling Covert. The covert is between Foston and Peatling Magna, just beyond Great Peatling Lodge.

First, on the right, is Reed Pool, a covert always drawn in Fernie's time, but seldom in recent years. Reed Pool itself consists of oak and ash, and

THE LITTLE PEATLING SPINNEYS.

there are two small spinneys south of it, known as the Black or Round Spinneys, composed of fir mixed with other trees. Immediately below Reed Pool flows the brook, which is practically unjumpable because of the rottenness of its banks. Great Peatling Lodge, on the left of the road, and surrounded by fine old elms and beeches, is approached through an avenue of Californian pines. The Lodge is owned by Mr. Bailey, who farms the land, and has bred several good hunters which have taken prizes at the Leicester and Harborough agricultural shows. The spire of Peatling Magna Church can be seen across a few fields, with Gilmorton Church and the mill on the horizon beyond.

Great Peatling Covert is the first draw after a meet at Kilby. This large covert, full of tall ash trees and blackthorn, is on the western slope of the hillside leading to the Countesthorpe valley. East of the covert, extending along its whole length, is a big upland pasture, and alongside part of the boundary fence on the far edge of this field there is some rough gorse covert where an occasional outlier is found towards the end of the season. This stiff boundary fence is seldom jumped, and when a fox goes away for the turnpike and Wistow, a good start through the gate in the corner of the field is the first consideration. Due south of Peatling Covert is Bruntingthorpe, and conspicuous on the horizon are the aerials of the wireless station at Hillmorton, near Rugby; these aerials can be seen from a great distance with curious distinctness, often appearing much closer than they really are. When a fox goes west, the line runs over a beautiful bit of country towards Whetstone Gorse, past Westdale Farm beyond the brook. A few years ago, for several seasons, the Peatling foxes which took a line for Whetstone suddenly disappeared near the Countesthorpe Brook, where hounds always threw up. After a careful search an old drain was discovered where the fox had hidden on each occasion. A grating now covers the entrance to this retreat. Once over the first valley, the land on the south-west slopes to the second valley and the streams by Willoughby Waterless. Less than a mile away is Peatling Magna, and about a mile south-east is Arnesby with its old windmill.

We have now completed a tour of the Monday country west of the Welford turnpike and, crossing it near Foston, take the road to Kilby and Wistow.

Kilby Bridge and Peatling were two frequent meets in Tailby's time—Kilby Bridge is one and a half miles north-west of Kilby—and Peatling Covert, then called Peatling Gorse, was always the first draw. The village of Kilby consists of one street leading into the roads that branch north and south to Wistow and Fleckney. Kilby Church was rebuilt in the middle of the nineteenth century of Mountsorrel granite. There is an old blacksmith's shop opposite the small inn; the blacksmith, Mr. Clarke, is a sportsman who hunted in his younger days and is a great man for fencing-repairs and the removal of wire. In the country just described there is no wire, and all the fences are practicable when they are not too stiff; but close to Kilby there is one landowner who wires all his fences and this relatively small area is in consequence unridable, but well gated. The land in question surrounds the famous Wistow Covert, and one or two small adjacent spinneys. Leaving Kilby by the Wistow road, the first of these is Amberdale Spinney.

Before coming to the spinney, which is close to Kilby Lodge, the road

passes alongside the Sence, with the canal less than half a mile beyond. Tythorn Spinney and the Canal Spinneys, which can be seen beyond the river, are all drawn when hounds meet at Wistow Cross-roads. The small Amberdale Spinney composed of pines and larches is on the right of the road. A track across the fields leads past it to Wistow Covert, which is on a hill midway between Wistow and Fleckney. Looking north, Wistow Long Plantation conceals the Hall and river behind it; at one end are two large and ancient elm trees, the last two remaining of a landmark well-known many years ago as the Nine Elms. The two old trees tower high above the plantation on the skyline about half a mile away. Wistow Long Plantation was always a sure find when Mr. Mark Firth lived at Wistow Hall, but, since then, during the last fifteen years, it has seldom held a fox. Wistow covert, however, sometimes called Wistow Gorse, is one of the great strongholds for foxes in the Fernie country.

In shape the covert is a long plantation composed largely of elms, ending in a circular extension on the brow of the hill, containing thorn and other undergrowth, and a tall group of ash trees. The view over the hill south-east includes Gumley Wood and the Laughton Hills, indicating the line a fox may take in this direction; while due south is Mowsley Covert, the village of Mowsley being three and a half miles away, and the covert about a mile further. Once the small area of wire is passed, this is a splendid line of country, crossing the course used in 1926 for the point-to-point races, between John Ball and Saddington.

It is possible that the circular end of Wistow Covert was the old Fleckney Gorse of Quorn country, its position being similar to that of Fleckney Gorse, according to some early accounts of runs. Thus Nimrod in "Hunting Reminiscences" describes a run from Glenn Gorse to Oadby and Wistow, through Fleckney Gorse, leaving Kilby on the right. Tailby writes of Wistow Gorse in 1856, but does not mention Fleckney Gorse.

After returning to the Wistow road and crossing the shooting-range built and used by the late Sir Henry Halford of Wistow Hall, who was a famous shot, the Hall, now the seat of Lord Cottisloe, is approached through an avenue of limes and beeches. On the left are the Newton Harcourt Spinneys, and north of the little village of Newton Harcourt is Wither's Spinney, of little importance and now seldom drawn. The Newton Harcourt Spinneys are generally drawn in the cubbing season, but seldom hold foxes.

Passing Wistow Hall, the historical associations of which will be given in the next chapter, we come to a famous Fernie meet—Wistow Cross-roads.

A small bridge over the canal at the cross-roads will remind people who

hunt in the country of the blind gate-opener Ernest Bird, a native of Fleckney, who has for years attended all the meets round Wistow and many miles beyond. His favourite stand is at the gate by the bridge, and in spite of the crowds he has never had an accident. Blind from boyhood, Ernest Bird is quite at his ease among crowds of horses and cars, and few people in the country know more about foxes. He goes to any of the coverts in the district without assistance, and has never missed a Monday meet since he can remember. When the fixture is Great Glenn he always takes the gate by the Oaks. There are many gate-openers in Leicestershire who are familiar figures, but few who have such

WISTOW HALL.

an interest in the chase or such a fund of anecdotes as the blind man; he is an encyclopædia of local gossip. His stories cannot be easily recorded, for he rattles them off so fast that one runs into another until their outlines are lost; but it is well worth spending an hour with him, and he is generally to be found somewhere near Wistow by a bridle-gate, even in summer.

The next covert of importance is the Mount, recently replanted with privet. This covert is on a hill overlooking the river and canal, and the four or five houses composing Newton Harcourt. Usually in Thatcher's time the Canal Spinneys were first drawn after a meet at Wistow Cross-roads, then the Mount, and finally Wistow Covert. Now the Mount is the first draw, the Canal

Spinneys being only drawn on occasion, or run through if hounds are in the neighbourhood.

Wistow Grange, farmed by that good sportsman Mr. Arnold, generally a sure starter in the farmer's race at the annual point-to-point, is close to the Mount. After passing Mr. Arnold's farm on the right of the road to Kibworth, and crossing the canal and railway, the Harborough turnpike is reached.

There are no more coverts on this side of the Monday country except a little spinney known as King's Spinney on the left of the Kibworth road, occasionally drawn in Fernie's time, but never known to have held a fox.

The large villages of Kibworth Harcourt and Kibworth Beauchamp are close together and almost joined to Smeeton Westerby. The Rose and Crown Inn at Kibworth Harcourt was once a popular hunting inn. Dale mentions having stayed there for several weeks when hunting in the country. Like the " Black Horse " at Billesdon and the inn of the same name at Foxton, there was good stabling, and people who preferred being outside Harborough in a pleasant village, not too far from that town and on the main road to Leicester, stayed at the " Rose and Crown."

CHAPTER V

WISTOW HALL

"It was at Wistow Hall that Sir Richard Halford, Knt., furnished the unfortunate King Charles with a place of refuge and retirement."—J. H. Hill.

THE shadows from the trees by the river and round Wistow Hall were lengthening as the hot June day drew to a close, the low sun glowing with the intensity of late afternoon and suffusing the river valley with a golden haze of light, when the fugitives from Naseby passed on either side of Wistow, along the Leicester road, or down the valley to Kilby Ford.

They came from all quarters, for the Royalists were widely scattered after the battle, and had suffered further losses at many points along the course of the Welland. Only the Royalist horse—or what remained of them—had left the field of Naseby; the foot had been surrounded, and had laid down their arms, with the exception of one gallant regiment which fought to the last. Many of the fugitives had been cut down at Marston Trussell and many more on the outskirts of Harborough. Cromwell pressed the pursuit hotly, and few of the Cavaliers who escaped drew rein until they were in sight of Leicester. The King himself had attempted to rally his troops near Moot Hill above Farndon for a final charge, and had almost succeeded, when the Earl of Carnewath "on a sudden laid his hand on the bridle of the King's horse, and swearing two or three full-mouthed Scottish oaths (for of that nationality he was), said, 'Will you go upon your death in an instant?'" * All attempts to stay the panic that followed were vain. The overwhelmed Royalists "broke and fled."

Accounts of the battle from Royalist sources make it clear that there was great anxiety concerning the King's personal safety, for it was evident that the Parliamentarians were bent upon taking him, dead or alive. Thus Symonds records in his diary, describing the commencement of the action: "They shot two pieces of canon; we one. One of theirs was at the King's body of horse, where he was before. No question they had certain intelligence

* Clarendon, "History of the Rebellion."

where he was; for one that came in the King's train ran over to them, and they left all others to charge up to his body."

The incident described by Clarendon is the subject of a rare engraving, perhaps the most correct in detail of all the pictures of Naseby. A description of it will help to the understanding of the equipment left by the King at Wistow during the retreat. His saddle—hereafter described—is heavy and cumbersome, but the cavaliers, contrary to the popular misconception, went into battle in armour: "A picturesque array, accoutred in the old chivalric fashion, with plumed helmet and light armour, over a leathern doublet, steel cuisses to the knee, and huge gambadoes with the large knightly spur. Tall, powerful horses such as Wouvermans has left us stepped proudly under their caparaisons." *

This description is borne out by the print, with a most interesting detail added. Several contemporary writers refer to the coloured scarves—worn round the waist—which distinguished friend from foe in battle. That such a distinction was necessary is proved by the fact that when Prince Rupert charged on after routing Ireton's horse, and approached the Roundheads' baggage column, its commander mistook him at a distance for one of his own leaders and went forward to ask for news of the day.† The King in the print is wearing the conventional plumed hat—while his followers have steel helmets—but is otherwise fully armoured. The Earl of Carnewath, who is holding the King's bridle, might be a mediæval knight, except for his gambadoes and the long scarf round his waist. The King was an expert on armour, and shortly before the Civil War had made attempts to get it standardised throughout the army. The Roundheads were not all drab Puritans, as they are so often described or pictured: many of them were men of high position and old families, indulging in a display of standards and other signs of their rank in the manner of Royalists. Red was a favourite colour on both sides, hence Prince Rupert's scarlet cloak did not at once identify him as one of the Royalist leaders. The weight of saddle and armour which the horses had to carry told on them during the retreat, and the King, as will be seen, was obliged to stop at Sir Richard Halford's mansion to get a fresh horse before pressing on to Leicester.

Early in the nineteenth century there were many country people living who had received first-hand narratives of the battle. An old man living near Naseby remembered how his grandfather described the morning of the fight, having

* Warburton, "Memoirs of Prince Rupert and the Cavaliers."
† Joshua Sprigge.

been tending cattle as a boy of nine, and afterwards having witnessed the burial of the dead by the country people. Morton, the author of the " History of Northamptonshire," written early in the eighteenth century, spoke to an eye-witness of the cutting down of the ladies in the Royal train—the most tragic incident of the retreat. This atrocity was not known at the time to the Parliamentary leaders, and Morton ascribes it—because of the shouts of the Roundhead troopers, " Remember Cornwall," heard by his informant—to retaliation for similar atrocities committed by the Royalists under Sir Ralph Hopton; but of these there is no record. It is only just to think that there was some defence of the Royal train, because of the number of Cavaliers killed during the retreat from Farndon to Harborough.

From this dark page of history we must turn to the events of a few hours afterwards round Wistow.

History is often colourless in the reading because of the failure to realise the details of the small happenings which contributed to the great events. If we could *see* for a few seconds these happenings in progress, what a flood of light would be shed on the events of months, perhaps of years. A short sentence in a contemporary record will often stimulate the imagination to reconstruct a whole scene; the light blazes up for a moment and then dies out. Joshua Sprigge has such a sentence: " Our horse had the chase of the enemie from that place, within three miles of Leicester, took many prisoners, and *had the execution of them all the way*." . . . Years seem to roll back before a ray of light on Wistow Hall.

The green of the trees and open meadows has lost its brilliance in a haze of dust, beaten up from the dry ground by galloping horses. The pale colours are brightened by the flash in the sunlight of the shallow water of the Sence, where a grass-grown track by Wistow leads to the ford. Rapidly moving figures of men and horses pass from the dust cloud into a film of spray. The drumming of hoofs on the grass changes to the swishing of water. There are shouts and oaths as one horseman after another splashes and flounders from bank to bank. In the space of a few seconds figures stand out momentarily, one succeeding another as they approach the ford. A Cavalier with fair hair blown over the shoulder-straps of his cuirass, his helmet gone, without pike or sword, leans forward in his saddle—a boyish figure in spite of his armour, a boyish face, hot and smeared with battle-stains, yet white on the forehead below his golden hair. His big roan horse swerves on the bank. A Cromwellian trooper passes him and reins back. A sword's point darts out in line with the Cromwellian's lowered head, his face shadowed by the triple bars of his helmet. The

Cavalier tumbles on the neck of his horse, both falling heavily in the stream. Rearing up from the water, the horse plunges on, flying reins and stirrups lost in the dust. Three of Rupert's dragoons come together to the ford, the pike of one of them, still attached to his arm by a strap, hitting his chestnut mare on the quarters as she charges down the bank. The Roundhead misses the first with a cut, intercepting them as they pass. But the second dragoon hits his horse over the head with a gauntleted hand, causing it to plunge out of the way. He looks back laughing—a sallow foxy-faced man with red goatee—and as he bumps in the saddle over the opposite bank, the skirt-pockets of his coat, stuffed with coins from the spoils of Leicester, fly out against his cuirass. The Cromwellian slips his sword into its leather scabbard, pulls out of his pocket a flash and touch box, and lifts a horse pistol from his saddle-bow. The flash of the discharge sears the dust with its red light. The effect of the shot cannot be seen—some half score of musketeers sweep the trooper on with them. A sword rings on an iron head-piece, a musket is discharged. Then the dust hides them, as it obscures the shadows cast by the sun. Scarcely a mile away on the road by Glenn, over the meadows by Kilby, down the hillside towards Fleckney town can be heard the sound of desultory fighting. A pistol or musket shot echoes round the walls of Wistow, or throbs in the haze about Glenn and the Strettons. Through that haze, already overcast by the long shadows of trees driving back the sunlight, come other sounds—voices that seem mocked by echoes; a persistent thudding on the road that may be the sound of horse hoofs or of men running; a crash, or noise of falling; the sharp screaming neigh of a horse, uncanny as the wailing of a banshee. And through the dust, only six or seven riding with him, comes the King.

His dun horse with long mane and tail is stained with foam as a rock left frothing by the tide, his spurs have scored its flanks as though the crimson saddle had been torn and hung in shreds; the horse leans on its bridle and stumbles before the gates of Wistow. The King's sword is drawn, the gauntlet of his sword-hand being slashed across; more than once on the road he has had to fight his way. There is anger in his voice as he calls on those by him to open Wistow gates. He hurries through, his sword-arm dropped for a moment to his side, though his teeth are still set and his eyes sullen with the wrath of one who has not only had his dignity flouted, his private cabinet rifled, the ladies who depended on him for their safety—ah, where are they?—but has had to fight for his life like a felon over the fields and highways of his country. The sun outlines the ivory profile of his face and his stained armour

against the deepening blue and purple shadows of Sir Richard Halford's house —dear to him, indeed, in memory. Two days before he had been hunting, the huntsman winding his long horn in Fawsley Park, the hounds breaking covert where the buck had crossed the road for Staverton. Now Wistow Hall looms up with its stone gables dark against a glowing sky—a shadow that cannot give him rest. Who would dare to welcome a fugitive King? From the edge of the lake on the left of Wistow gates a flame quivers—a musket ball brings down the leaves above his head.

Some Roundhead troopers have dismounted near the gates. Leaving their horses, they creep up along the bank of the lake. Bullets ring on the stone-work of the house and the massive entrance door, smoke curls out from the reeds. A horse staggers and falls. A Cavalier sinks down against the ledge of an adjoining window. The door opens and the King enters, while his retinue with the horses move rapidly to the back of the Hall. Meanwhile, news of the King's danger has been carried to the Earl of Lichfield, then riding into Glenn. He rallies half a squadron, and the sound of their advance is heard as they approach Wistow. Over the ford come two riderless horses and a broken troop of Cromwell's dragoons. There is a loud shout behind them, a long continuous splash in the water, as the Earl of Lichfield and his half squadron, flecked with spray and foam, thunder up to Wistow gates.

Such is the scene that Sprigge's words call to life; we must now examine the historical evidence for its truth.

The exact route followed by the King will never be known. He is supposed to have watered his horse at a spring near Tur Langton, called King Charles's Well; * tradition also says that he passed over King's Hill near East Norton, but this is going too far afield. At Wistow, however, there is no doubt about the truth of the evidence, not only that he halted there, but that a rally was made in his defence.

The King had stayed with Sir Richard Halford on the night of June 4th, when his army was at Newton Harcourt (his horse-guards being at Kilby and Foston); Newton Harcourt was the first rendezvous on the march from Leicester to Harborough.†

There was no time during the retreat for the King to stop long at Wistow—not even time to change his saddle on to another horse. Cromwell's troopers were pressing the Royalists. "The horse escaped to Leicester this afternoon," writes Symonds, "and were pursued by a body of the enemies horse and loose scouters to Great Glyn; and then the Earl of Lichfield charged their horsemen

* Or, Charles's Trough.

† Symonds, MS. diary.

with half a score (squadron ?) of horse and beat them back." Great Glenn is a mile from Wistow across the river, and this encounter, which took place close to Wistow—Great Glenn being the extreme limit of the pursuit—was undoubtedly fought to save the King. A few moments before, he had left his exhausted horse and entered Wistow Hall; the door was closed, and Cromwell's dragoons, galloping up, met Lichfield's horsemen. A running fight ensued during which muskets were discharged. It is possible that previously some of the Cromwellians had dismounted and commenced a fusillade on the front of the house. This is conjecture; but long afterwards a door was found in the drawing room at Wistow, which was one of the original entrances; the door was removed from the wall where it had been built up, and on its metal-studded surface were bullet marks. It can be seen to-day, fitted in the outer wall of the house. The Earl of Lichfield dispersed the Roundheads, and here, nine miles from Harborough, even to sight of Leicester, according to Cromwell's own account, the pursuit was stayed.

In the pages of Kelly ("Royal Progresses") this narrative, or fragments of different narratives, is in part confirmed; "the King at the head of his own troop charged through the enemy and fled to Harborough, thence to Leicester, staying at Wistow to get a fresh horse, leaving behind him his richly embroidered crimson silk and velvet saddle and brass stirrups." The saddle is still at Wistow, and there is a record in the Hall of another saddle having been left there, two bits, stirrup-irons, two swords and a horse pistol. The sword which is supposed to have belonged to the King was eventually given to George IV. The Royalists rode on to Leicester. Kelly continues: "After a brief rest, and doubtless with another fresh horse, the weary and dispirited King and his attendants fled towards Ashby-de-la-Zouch."

Thus closes the drama of Naseby, as far as the events immediately following the battle are concerned. It has left a curious medley of history and legend throughout the countryside. Many stories told by those who were living in the country at the time have been either garbled or forgotten; but some have been recorded in the old country histories. A strange one is related by Throsby:

"I have been told that Mr. Hobson, who resided at or near this village (Great Glenn) was raised to opulence by the following circumstance: immediately after the battle at Naseby, a servant, going into the field, saw a stranger on horse-back, riding hastily, throw a portmanteau over a hedge into a ditch; which the boy, after the stranger was gone, picked up and brought to his master, who found it to contain mostly money, which his master told him were only *hob-nails*. Mr. Hobson, after keeping the property some time, and finding

photograph taken specially for this book and reproduced by permission of Lord Cottis

THE KING'S SADDLE AND OTHER RELICS OF NASEBY AT WISTOW HALL

The saddle on the right, to which the stirrup-iron belongs, was used by Charles I at the Battle of Naseby, and was left by him at Wistow Hall during the retreat. The other saddle, the two curb bits, the two insignia, and the Toledo sword also belonged to the King. Another and much shorter sword which he left at Wistow was given to George IV

that no enquiry was made after it, turned his good luck to his own account, after rewarding the boy who found the portmanteau. Mr. Hobson frequently told the story at the decline of his life; from whose account of the transactions it was then generally believed that a thief had taken advantage of the confusion attendant on an army after the defeat, and, being pursued, threw it into the ditch, with an intent to return to it again or to prevent being detected."

There is little doubt that the thief had been rifling the pockets of the dead and was riding from the battlefield. His forethought in taking a portmanteau is proof not only of his predatory intentions, but of his knowledge of the booty that might be obtained. He was probably a deserter from the Royalist army. The weight of coins carried by the whole army, nearly every soldier of which—especially among the foot—had stuffed his pockets, wallets or other convenient places with what he had plundered in Leicester, must have added a considerable burden to the weight of their arms and equipment. The battlefield immediately after the fight must have held a large fortune available for anyone who was able to collect it. Eye-witnesses have described the burial of the dead by the villagers round Naseby—they have also stated that many of the bodies had been stripped before burial. It was easier to carry away the clothes with all they contained than to search their pockets. Part of the battlefield was a morass, and those who had fallen there could not be found or robbed so quickly. The looting continued for several days.

Far from the scene of the fight itself, in the counties bordering Northamptonshire, particularly in Leicestershire on the line of the retreat, wild stories and garbled accounts of the battle passed from village to village, news filtering through from the hamlets near Naseby to the outlying towns.

What excitement and what rumours of events whose portent was little known must have thrilled the Leicestershire country people that night! For them the flight of the King was only a rumour, and trifling incidents like the runaway thief were their own experiences of the fateful day. There were other small happenings in every village for miles around: stray horses without riders wandering over the fields, wounded men who sought shelter in the villages, coaches or wagons with wheels broken stranded in the tracks used by the pack-horses. Vague terrors kept many people from their beds: small crowds collected to watch the conflagration at Knaptoft, lighting up the southern sky; and through the early hours of the morning could be heard the movement of the Parliament's army marching on Leicester. For two days this suspense and terror continued, until, on the 16th of June, the sound of guns in a brief bombardment of the Newarke wall suddenly ceased, the small garrison left by the

Royalists having surrendered, and the troops under Fairfax and Cromwell marched into the town.

To-day, in as beautiful a pastoral setting as Leicestershire can show, Wistow Hall, half concealed from the road by the tall reeds growing round the lake in front of the house, looks out over the quiet valley of the Sence.

Long ago, in 849, Berthfa, son of the King of Mercia, slew his kinsman, the holy Wiston, after whom the place is named—Wistentane of Domesday. Its church is dedicated to St. Winston. In the time of Henry II the Lord of the Manor was William de Hastings, and it was held by the Hastings family until 1483, when William, Lord Hastings, was executed. After brief changes of ownership the Manor was sold to Andrew Halford, son of Richard Halford of Clipston in Northamptonshire. The last Baronet of the Halford family died in 1780, and the Manor passed by marriage to the Vaughans of Leicester. Henry Vaughan was created a Baronet in 1809; he inherited the Wistow estate in 1814, and then assumed the name of Halford.

The passing centuries have left Wistow Hall little changed, with a deep feeling of peace all about it—even its ghosts hardly disturb the grey old house and quiet lawns. Yet sometimes, when fog rises about its walls and the lake glimmers under a night sky, the rattle of wheels and tramp of horses can be heard, and footsteps sound in the passages. Such hauntings are but echoes of its age-long history. The soil of Wistow has seen battle and tragedy, from the days of the old Kings of Mercia to the evening of Naseby.

CHAPTER VI

MONDAY COUNTRY (*continued*)

GUMLEY AND THE LAUGHTON HILLS

"It is supposed that Mr. Meynell's last appearance on the covert side was at Gumley in January 1798."—W. C. A. BLEW.

THE above quotation refers to Meynell's last appearance in the field as Master of the Quorn, though it is not conclusive; and there is reason for believing that he was present in the great run from Billesdon Coplow in 1800. Gumley was a very popular meet of the Quorn under Meynell, and it also became famous at that time as the scene of Mr. Hanbury's experiments in nursery gardening. The Rector of Church Langton was not allowed to enclose any of the common-land round his own village—he might plant the young trees but not protect them from his neighbours' cattle—and in despair he transferred his plantations to Gumley. Evidence of them can be seen to-day round Gumley Hall.

After passing through the village of Kibworth Beauchamp and Smeeton Westerby—having turned due south from the Leicester turnpike—and crossing the canal, Gumley Wood can be seen on the hill straight in front. Before ascending the long slope the old drover's track is crossed, leading on the left to Debdale Wharf, once a regular meet of the Fernie Hunt. Smeeton Gorse is on the right of the road, on a rounded hill of the same name. This famous covert was burnt down a few years ago and has not been drawn since; it was a real gorse covert, unlike so many which have retained the designation, and its destruction has been a great loss to the Hunt—happily not a permanent one, for new gorse is growing on the hillside. From the summit of Gumley Hill the view extends to the Coplow and many of the Cottesmore Woods: Skeffington and Tilton lead the eye to Robin-a-Tiptoe and the woods of Launde. Below these in the middle distance is the village of Tur Langton; beyond are Shangton and Glooston, their red houses plainly visible, and then the woods of Noseley, the Hall appearing among the trees. The tall square tower of Church Langton stands

out above the Langton Spinneys, with Thorpe Langton further to the right. A white spot, far away among the blue wooded hills, is Slawston Windmill, and following the horizon beyond Slawston, Rockingham Forest, in the Woodland Pytchley country, fades into still bluer distance before the dark mass of Gumley Wood on the right breaks into the panorama.

Gumley Wood, one of the historic first draws of the season, is north-east of the Hall, a dense covert composed of most forest trees with bracken and undergrowth. Gumley Covert lies on the southern slope of the hill in front of the Hall, next to the Mot, a wooded hollow, and to the Gorse. The name Gumley Covert includes them all. The covert itself is a pine and beech wood, the Gorse a furzy slope beyond the Mot.

Gumley Hall is a large mansion of red brick with a stone colonnade. It was partly rebuilt by Mr. Joseph Cradock towards the end of the eighteenth century, who inherited it from his father, Joseph Cradock, Lord of the Manor of Gumley from 1703 to 1759. The son was a great enthusiast at landscape gardening, and to him the grounds of the Hall owe their pleasing formal design. The Hall had many tenants during the nineteenth century, and was eventually sold to Sir John Cradock Hartopp, who again sold it to his brother-in-law, Captain Whitmore, from whom it was purchased by the late Mr. George Murray Smith, the publisher, whose widow, the Hon. Mrs. Murray Smith, is the present owner. In the park is the War Memorial, on which are the names of her two sons killed in the War, Lt. A. Murray Smith of the 2nd Life Guards and Lt. G. Murray Smith of the Royal Fusiliers.

The park looks south over the Laughton Hills; a hundred yards away, encircling the northern slope, is Holloway Spinney. It is usually drawn before going on to Gumley Wood. All that remains of Smeeton Gorse can be seen through the trees across the intervening valley.

The beautiful little village of Gumley, with its red brick houses, is on the eastern slope of the hill, the descent from the village leading to the cross-roads, where the Lubenham Road through Foxton to Mowsley joins the road to Theddingworth. The right hand road to Mowsley leads on to the Laughton Hills, overlooking the canal and the Valley of the Welland.

We are here in the extreme southern part of the Monday country, on a long range of hills very similar, on a rather smaller scale, to the Hog's Back in Surrey. A road runs the length of the hills with a wide landscape stretching away on either side. To the north is the village of Laughton, with Saddington reservoir and village beyond it, while further to the west is Mowsley on the southern slope of the Knaptoft watershed. To the south beyond the Union Canal and the

Welland are the Marston and Hothorpe Hills. The first wood is Bunkers Hill at the western end of the ridge—an oak wood that is always a sure find. It is separated from the almost continuous line of woods on the southern slope by a steep grass descent leading to the canal, after falling abruptly into a little hollow overgrown with elder and other small trees. Through this opening in the woods can be seen Thorpe Lubenham Hall, the residence of Major Wernher, Joint Master of the Fernie, and further away the octagonal walls of Papillon Hall shining among the trees. Close to the canal is a group of tall poplars at the foot of Bunkers Hill. The canal is here crossed by a bridge, the next after

MOWSLEY COVERT.

the bridge on the Theddingworth–Gumley road. There is a third bridge over the canal on the road from Theddingworth to Mowsley, where the Laughton Hills end. The woods continue along the steep slope—oak and ash, and occasional poplars near the canal. Once past the flagstaff, a well-known landmark which can be seen for miles, the country becomes more open and the village of Husbands Bosworth can now be plainly seen on the opposite ridge beyond the canal. Close to Bosworth Gorse, many of the fields are under cultivation ; but a fine country stretches north and west beyond Mowsley village, leading to John and Jane Ball, the Peatlings, Gilmorton, Walton Holt and Mowsley Covert, south of which is Bosworth Gorse—a country of strong but

jumpable fences, and, except for some plough near Husbands Bosworth, an unbroken succession of grass fields.

Mowsley village is a regular Monday meet, the first draw to-day being Mowsley Covert. In Fernie's time it was usually Gilmorton. The covert is a mile and a half from the village and just over a mile from Theddingworth, near the Theddingworth road. It looks across to Bosworth Gorse, a few fields away, on the slope of a hill. A fox from Mowsley usually runs into Bosworth Gorse, across the little valley between the two coverts. It will be remembered that the covert was made by Isaac as an alternative draw to the Gorse. It is now owned by Sir Maurice Levy. The covert is mostly of thorn with a few ash trees. A wonderful view is obtained from this spot over the borders of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, the country spread out like a map, the fields and fences receding without a break, except for the villages of Theddingworth and Husbands Bosworth, to the Hothorpe and Marston Hills. Naseby spire dominates the southern horizon, nearly six miles away, and two miles beyond Husbands Bosworth is Major Guy Paget's residence, Sulby Hall, in the Pytchley country.

Bosworth Gorse is on the Fernie boundary, but a fox will generally make for Walton Holt, or there may be a fine three miles point to Pamps Gorse. A run from Bosworth Gorse over the Theddingworth Flats—where there are big but jumpable fences—to the Laughton Hills is rather spoilt by the canal and railway.

We must now leave Mowsley Covert for Walton Holt, in the extreme southern portion of the Monday country, a covert west of the Welford turnpike, not included in Chapter III, afterwards returning to the Theddingworth Flats to review the narrow strip of Fernie country south of the Laughton Hills, and the neutral coverts.

Walton Holt is without question the best covert in the Monday country; it is also one of the oldest. Dale states that the Holt was made under the direction of Oldacre, and—apart from documentary evidence—there is every reason to suppose he is correct; the symmetrical thick-set thorn covert bears the stamp of Oldacre's skill. It is twelve acres in extent, and square in shape, except for a projection on the west at right angles to the rest. Walton Holt is on the south-western slope of a hill similar to that on which are John and Jane Ball, though the hill is lower and its slopes are more gradual. The line of a fox may be south to Kilworth Sticks, or north-west either to Gilmorton or Great Peatling; providing in each case the possibility of as fine a run as any in the Fernie country. There is no wire, and one field of plough only is

THE VALLEY OF THE WELLAND, FROM THE LAUGHTON HILLS

visible from the hill. At the cross-roads where the Kilworth road joins the Leicester–Welford turnpike is the famous 12th Milestone—one of the great Monday meets in Tailby's time and up to the end of Fernie's Mastership, though recently the 12th Milestone has not figured in the list of fixtures.

There was a great gathering there on December 14th, 1908, Mrs. Fernie acting as Master and Captain Warner as Field Master. The list of those who attended—including many celebrated in the annals of the Hunt, and many who still ride with the Fernie, besides some notable visitors—is worth quoting from the Press accounts of the time :

" Those out during the day included the Grand Duke of Bavaria, the Hon. Mrs. Murray Smith, Colonel Chaplin, Captain Chaplin, Miss Dickinson, Miss Collington, Mr. George Coleman, Miss Whittaker, Count d'Arco, Mr. Eyre, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Baillie, Rev. A. Rokeby, Countess Wrangel, Mrs. Laurie Johnson, Major and Miss Pochin, Mr. J. T. Mills, Mr. Harry Mills, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Cunard, Mr. J. W. Mason, Captain Aikman, Mr. J. Noble, Mr. and Mrs. Turville-Petre, Mr. H. S. Macpherson, Major McKie, Mr. Hobbs, Messrs. F. and G. Bellville, Mr. Mark Firth, Mr. Alec Cross, Mr. Sydney Loder and Major Schofield."

On that day a fox was found in Walton Holt, but the sport which followed, though full of incidents, was not of a kind to make hunting history ; it evidently gave enjoyment, however, to the writer of the following paragraphs, quoted from *The Leicester Journal :*

" After a few times round his home pug agreed to dance ; getting over the main road at the first opportunity, he would have gone on to Mowsley Covert had the course been clear. But instead he spun away to the Laughton Hills, and on round the village to what he deemed a place of security in Mr. Byron's ground just under Mowsley village. During the chase the 2nd Whip got a spill calculated to upset all internal economy ; but notwithstanding that he was ' gondoled ' many yards along the turf, he came up smiling, yet was a ' marked man ' during the remainder of the day. Efforts were made to bolt the fox, a valiant little terrier performing prodigies of valour, but spades were trumps, and the ' muckle beast,' who was as vicious as the ' yallah ' dog of Abner Briggs, was seized by his latter end and deposited in a sack, the captive being entrusted to the safe keeping of Mr. Hancock, a sporting farmer of Shearsby, who was the cynosure of all eyes as he proudly dangled the trophy from his saddle-bow until a request was made by Thatcher and Co. for his services.

" Meanwhile hounds were taken on to John Ball, the appeal to-day being

made much earlier in the day than usual, and was consequently calculated to wipe out the not entirely unmerited reproach by the owner of the old fortress that hounds were seldom taken there until weary with toil. However, John had nothing to offer to-day, but his neighbour Jane held a fox, though of a very craven type, and physically as lank as a thread paper. Although manifesting but little heart to fight, he would have shown more enterprise but for the intrusion of ' twa dogs,' which drove him back to his haunt. Whilst the quest at Jane Ball was proceeding a free entertainment was provided on the summit of the mountain. A horse, whose proper sphere of life would seem to be in a circus, suddenly flung himself to the ground, jerking his rider from the saddle, and turning himself over, poking his nose and hoofs skyward, whilst all the field wondered. The rider, however, regarded the feat with philosophic gravity, suggestive of a chronic weakness on the part of the quad, which, to the surprise of the crowd, though he looked for stars failed to receive stripes."

And before the writer thought of any more puns, let us hope another fox went away from Jane Ball.

Two miles along the Welford road from the 12th Milestone is Husbands Bosworth, the road crossing the railway and canal. East of the village is Bosworth Hall, for several generations the seat of the Turville family, and earlier of the Fortescues and the Smiths. The present Hall is early Georgian, set in a small park. Husbands Bosworth Church was struck by lightning on July 6th, 1775, and as Throsby records " the bells were recast, after this disaster, at the expense of Mr. Fortescue." The first name of the village distinguishes it from Market Bosworth, and refers to husbandry, an older name being Bosworth-in-the-Felden. The distinction is tautological, since " worth " means land, field, or farm. Half a mile south-east of the village, the Welland, flowing west towards Sibbertoft, turns back towards Theddingworth, circling round the end of the Hothorpe Hills. It flows down a valley between these hills and the high ground on which is Sulby Hall; beyond Sulby is Welford and the Hemplow Hills. Leaving Husbands Bosworth for Theddingworth, we turn to the right in this village, cross the Welland, and enter Northamptonshire.

This turning is the road that passes near Mowsley Covert on the other side of the village, and it leads straight up to the Hothorpe Hills, neutral to the Fernie and the Pytchley.

After a meet at Theddingworth the draw is always de Trafford's Gorse, which lies to the right of the road, at the eastern end of the Hothorpe Hills, the Marston Hills being on the left. The road crosses the ridge between them and descends to Sibbertoft, less than a mile away. The owner of the covert,

Mr. C. E. de Trafford, lives at Hothorpe Hall, on the right of the road before the last slope of the hill. De Trafford's Gorse is a covert of large size, well wooded, with bracken and undergrowth, climbing the sides of a coombe on the Hothorpe Hills. The wooded slope of the hillside is precipitous, a rail fence running down from the road across the coombe and up the edge of the covert beyond, and disappearing under the overhanging oaks that rise in a tall mass at the top. The scene suggests Devonshire rather than the Shires.

DE TRAFFORD'S GORSE.

Runs from de Trafford's Gorse are usually into the Pytchley country, by Sulby and towards Naseby. There have been some good runs into the Fernie country on the other side, but foxes are often headed on the Lutterworth-Harborough turnpike, which passes through Husbands Bosworth and Theddingworth less than a mile from the covert. Foxes often get into the Marston Woods east of the Hothorpe Hills, where the going is heavy and the day may end with tired horses and ruffled tempers. On the far side of the Hothorpe Hills is Carnell's Spinney, a small spinney on their western promontory. A fox often runs from Carnell's Spinney across Bosworth Park.

East of de Trafford's Gorse, the view includes Marston Trussells (the covert), owned by Mr. Barwell Ewins of Marston Trussell Hall. The Marston Hills bear away to the south-east, covered with thick oak woods, with rides that are hock-deep in mud, awkward gullies, and steep coombes ; very trying to horses, these woods are not in great favour, except among foxes. Alford Thorns, which is separated from the woods by the Clipston road, is a Pytchley covert ; it was drawn by special permission in 1926 when the Fernie were short of country owing to foot-and-mouth restrictions, and was occasionally drawn in Fernie's time.

The little village of Marston Trussell is on the border of Northamptonshire, in the hundred of Rothwell. Originally Merston, it was called Merston Trussell (to distinguish it from Merston in the Sutton hundred) from the Trussells who were lords of the manor soon after the Conquest. In the reign of Henry VIII Elizabeth Trussell married John Vere, Earl of Oxford, and through her the manor passed to that family. Early in the eighteenth century it was held by the Barwell family, Mr. Edward Barwell being lord of the manor in 1791, and there is a tomb in the church to Henry Barwell, who died in 1710.

Marston Trussell Hall is a beautiful old stone mansion with a wrought-iron gateway of fine workmanship. The Hall looks across the park, over a large sheet of water, from which a small tributary stream runs into the Welland. The river flows behind the house, between Marston Trussell village and the Harborough turnpike. Mr. Barwell Ewins is a great breeder of cattle, the fine bullocks grazing in the park adding a distinctive note to the landscape. The covert is a low wood, south-west of the Hall—a frequent draw in the later period of Tailby's Mastership.

The road from Marston Trussell to Lubenham crosses the Welland and enters Leicestershire, joining the Lutterworth Harborough road. On the right, before the turnpike is reached, is Thorpe Lubenham Hall where Major Wernher, M.F.H., recently gave a garden party, entertaining the members and farmers of the Fernie Hunt. Those who were present will long remember this very enjoyable afternoon. The grounds of Thorpe Lubenham Hall were *en fête*, with concert parties and other entertainments, and a picturesque note among the tents and moving crowds was provided by the hounds and Hunt servants assembled in a field adjoining the gardens.

A little nearer to Lubenham itself are the remains of the house, surrounded by a moat, where the King stayed with Mr. Collins on the evening before Naseby.

Turning to the left on the turnpike we come to the last covert in the Monday country—Pamps Gorse. The southern slope of the Laughton Hills is now in front, across the canal; Bunkers Hill, the narrow field beside it, and the long line of woods stretching away to the west, form a background to Papillon Hall. The Hall is a mile from the hills on the far side of the turnpike, Pamps Gorse is immediately opposite, a field away on the near side of the road. The covert is chiefly composed of small trees, growing alongside the bank of the Welland.

Papillon Hall was one of the oldest houses in the country, but it was largely rebuilt some years ago by Sir Edwin Lutyens, the design taking the form of a butterfly, the gable-end, corresponding to the head, being the only part of the old house remaining. The house took its name from the French family of Papillon, who lived in England for centuries, one of whom was the builder of the original house. One of the ancestors of the family is supposed to have been William Papillon, a devoted servant of Edward I, who received many favours from the King. The octagonal shape of the house, which was built early in the seventeenth century by David Papillon of Lubenham, may have had no connection with the idea of a butterfly, though three butterflies have always been on the coat of arms. David Papillon was a student of fortification, on which he published a treatise in 1645, and the house was designed according to his theories, being originally surrounded by a moat. The Papillon pedigree does not go back further than the sixteenth century, but the first of the name mentioned in England is Toralden de Papillon in the time of William the Conqueror, and later Ralph Papillon, Abbot of Westminster in the time of King John. The recorded pedigree commences with Thomas Papillon who was a courtier in the reign of Henry IV of France; and one of his sons, Thomas, was born in Paris in 1578. His other son, David of Lubenham, married as his first wife Mary Castel, and as his second, Anne Mary Calandrini. In the death of one of these ladies—some unrecorded tragedy—originated the Papillon ghost story. The first wife of David Papillon, Mary Castel, was in all probability the owner of the slippers concerned in the story. What part Thomas Papillon, the brother of David, played in this tragedy will never be known.

Visitors to Papillon Hall—now the residence of Captain Frank Bellville—may see above the mantel in one of the lower rooms the door of a safe, let into the wall when the house was rebuilt by Sir Edwin Lutyens. In this safe are the slippers. The story goes that the two brothers Papillon were living at the Hall when the unhappy circumstances which caused the lady's death occurred. Before she died, she asked that the slippers might always be kept in the house

for her to walk in. Like Edgar Allan Poe's Ligeia, she meant to come back. A curse was to fall on the house if ever the slippers were removed.

On two occasions the slippers were taken from the building. Once they were stolen. A lady in the house became dangerously ill, only recovering when the thief was caught and the slippers were returned. The second time a series of tragedies took place. The slippers were sent to an exhibition in London. While they were away, there were two deaths connected with the house, and four polo ponies belonging to its owner were struck by lightning.

The son of David Papillon was Member of Parliament towards the end of the sixteenth century, and later members of the family were chiefly connected with the Papillon estate of Acrise in Kent.

The present house is a triumph of design, and very beautiful both inside and out ; while the old timbered gable still remaining as the head of the butterfly gives some idea of the appearance of the original building.

From Papillon the road runs into Lubenham and Market Harborough, joining the Leicester turnpike, which is the boundary between the Monday and Thursday countries.

CHAPTER VII

THURSDAY COUNTRY

"Where headed and foiled, his first point he forsook,
And merrily led them a dance o'er the brook,
Passed Galby and Norton, Great Stretton and Small,
Right onward still sweeping to Old Stretton Hall."

ROBERT LOWTH.

A FEW of the old coverts round Leicester on the Thursday country side still exist, but like Blaby Osiers they are being absorbed into the growing suburbs of the city, soon, perhaps, to disappear altogether. Chief of these are the Knighton Spinneys, close to Knighton, between the Harborough and Welford roads. The spinneys remain, but they are never drawn now. There is a sandpit near the North Evington Hospital which until the last few years held a litter of cubs every year, and was a favourite retreat for a run fox; many a good hunt has finished at this sandpit under the Crown Hills, on which the hospital stands. The belt of trees behind Evington village north of the golf course has also held foxes on many occasions. Hounds once ran over the course and the Hunt subsequently paid a donation to the Golf Club out of courtesy. But the Thursday Country is gradually receding farther from Leicester; the nearest coverts which still hold foxes and are regularly drawn are round Stoughton.

The Stoughton lane leads out of Leicester past the golf course, and the lodge gates of Stoughton Grange, one of the granges of the Abbey of Leicester. The Abbey had three granges (or farms): one at Stoughton, another at Ingarsby, a third in Derbyshire. At Ingarsby Old Hall, Major Vicars has restored the old refectory, which had been used as a barn. Stoughton Grange was the seat of Sir George Beaumont early in the eighteenth century, and at his death in 1737 passed to Mr. Peers James Keck, a descendant by marriage. At the beginning of the present century it was for a few years the home of the Bellville family; but recently the estate was sold by Mr. Powys-Keck, and the house, which was found to be unsaleable, was pulled down. The greater part of the estate was acquired as an investment for building and farming purposes

by the Manchester Co-operative Society. The old stables, which once held priceless hunters, are now used as farm steadings. The Grange was one of those large, rambling, inconvenient mansions that do not suit modern conditions. The work of demolition was commenced in 1925, and more regret might be felt for the old building if it had possessed greater claims to historical and architectural interest; but it had been enlarged and renovated until its character was lost. Far more moving than the wilderness of stones and rubble on the site of the Grange itself are the vista of the park, with Stoughton Church spire beyond it, seen from the terrace; the circular rim of a lily pond just visible in the grass; the Long Walk with its chestnuts; and the old walled garden, where the boles of apple trees and their twisted branches rise from a tangle of brier.

A short distance from the terrace is an elm tree which shares with the Braunston and Stapleford trees the distinction of having held a fox on many occasions. Such a tree becomes known as a regular lie for foxes, and few moments of a hunt are more exciting than the rush which follows the descent of the fox and the laying on of the hounds.

Two spinneys can be seen when looking across the park: the Brook Spinney and further away Harris's Spinney. Both spinneys are good; the latter (which we pass after leaving Stoughton village) is always a sure find. During a run in 1926, a fox was lost near the Brook Spinney; hounds threw up and, after several attempts to recover the line, were taken on to another covert. The fox was found by a shepherd curled up asleep in a field-tub close to the place where the line was lost. He was left unmolested to sleep off the effects of the run. On the left of the site of Stoughton Grange, by the Long Walk and the old Fish Pond, are the Dam Spinneys, a great stronghold for foxes. These generally make a point for Thurnby; few take such an erratic line as a fox which ran past the house some years ago and climbed on to the roof of the stables, where it perched in full view of the Hunt, before getting clean away through the kitchen garden. A run from these spinneys—thick plantations of spruce—may lead north-east by Thurnby, a mile away, and over a fine country towards Billesdon Coplow, or south-east to Glenn Gorse. While the Stoughton Dams are being drawn the field waits in the Long Walk under the grand old chestnut trees, whose leaves strewn over the banks on either side of the raised walk glow beneath the tracery of branches, catching the sunlight here and there, patterned with the shadows of horses and their riders, the colour intensified by the blue of an autumn sky, or fading as clouds pass overhead. The interlaced branches rattle as the tree-tops sway in the wind. The air is

keen with a touch of winter, scented with grass and a faint aroma from the spruce woods. Then, breaking from the covert, away go the hounds, slipping round the corner of the spinney and off for Thurnby. The chestnut leaves fly under a rush of hoofs, Stoughton is left behind, and soon the Coplow appears on the skyline beyond Houghton-on-the-Hill. With a fine country in front, and the outskirts of Leicester behind, anything may follow—a scurry to Thurnby or forty minutes over field, fence and brook beyond the Coplow into the Friday country of the Quorn.

THE DEMOLITION OF STOUGHTON GRANGE.

Leaving the Grange by the lodge gates leading to the Stoughton-Evington road, Keyes' Spinney (called on maps Jones's Spinney after a previous tenant of the land round it) is on the left of the road, and there are also a few small scattered coverts generally designated the Stoughton Spinneys. Keyes' Spinney often causes a check when a fox leaves Stoughton Dams. Taking the road to Stoughton past the old shooting kennels, where the Long Walk leads out into the village, and passing a covert known as Clarke's Bush (which is not regularly drawn, hounds being sometimes run through it), the next important covert is Harris's Spinney—Ash Holt on maps. This covert is entirely composed of ash, like Cradock's Ashes in the Quorn Monday country. Across the road is Swadborough Spinney. Foxes often run in and out between the two. Harris's Spinney may also lead to a line into the Quorn by Scraptoft.

Having now left the confines of Stoughton Grange, where the Stoughton hares caused Tailby to lose so many foxes, the Thursday country opens out and the lie of the land can be better appreciated. West of Rolleston and Noseley the country is divided into three main valleys, the first the valley of the Sence, the second of the Burton Brook, the third of the Carlton Brook. Both streams are tributaries of the Sence. Close to the Uppingham turnpike another small brook flows from Houghton-on-the-Hill and turns north to Thurnby, leaving the Fernie country and eventually reaching the Soar.

Along the whole length of the Thursday country runs the old Gartree Road, or Via Devana, from Leicester to Medbourne. There is no historical evidence for the Roman name—the theory being that the road led from Chester (Deva) through Medbourne (Mediumbury or Medenborough), which is about half-way between Chester and Colchester. The theory is plausible, but the Via Devana is not marked on the Itinerary of Antoninus with the other great Roman roads. Medbourne, where a fine Roman pavement and other remains have been found, may have been a Roman station, but it is more probable that there was only a large villa there and that the Gartree Road was the route from Leicester to this villa. The Strettons derive their name from Street-town, a place on the Gartree Road or Street. The road crosses the hundred of Gartree. Half-way between Leicester and Medbourne was a place known as Gartree Bush; the old manorial courts were held there, as they were at the Moody Bush Stone, between Barkby and Barkby Holt, and are said to have been at Copt Oak in Charnwood Forest.* Sections of the Gartree Road are used to-day, the longest being the road from Leicester past the Strettons; elsewhere the track becomes a grass bridle-road or is hardly traceable in the fields. For about a mile it forms the road by Illston Grange and Carlton Curlieu Manor House. By Stonton Wood and in the neighbourhood of Glooston it is a rough track leading down to Glooston village. From Glooston to Medbourne it is almost entirely lost.

Harris's Spinney is between the Gartree Road and the road from Stoughton to King's Norton and Gaulby; on the skyline is Houghton-on-the Hill, beside the Uppingham turnpike. After passing Swadborough Spinney, already mentioned—a small place of barely an acre, recently cut down, but a good lie

* The manorial courts have sometimes been confused with the Saxon swainmotes (swanimotes). The swainmote was a feudal court for considering forest laws held three times a year before the verderers. The "swanimotes" of Charnwood were manorial courts belonging to the manors of Whitwick, Groby, and Shepshed, the old Saxon name having survived the Saxon institutions; but the name does not apply to manorial courts such as those held at Gartree Bush and the Moody Bush Stone.

THE GARTREE ROAD NEAR GREAT STRETTON

for foxes—a turning to the left leads from the Norton road to Hall's Spinney. This fine spinney lies in the Houghton valley close to Houghton Lodge Farm; it has some smaller off-shoots adjoining it. A fox has not often been found at Hall's Spinney in recent years, but it is a regular Thursday draw. The spinney is in the cream of the Thursday country: there is no wire, the fences are chiefly cut-and-laid, with occasional timbered gaps; the pastures are spacious, undulating over Houghton Mere (the northern part of the Sence valley) and leading up along the course of the stream, the upper part of which is known as the Billesdon Brook, to the Uppingham turnpike and the Coplow. Near the Houghton Mere road—a gated field-road—there is a drain running a long way up the field on the left. This drain has been a refuge for many foxes, from which, in spite of much perseverance on many occasions, they have seldom been ejected.

Houghton Mere is typical Leicestershire country, and its road one that "on a dark night is not easily distinguished from the adjacent ridge and furrow." The road is open on either side, but it passes through fields that are divided from each other by hedges, and is crossed at frequent intervals by such gates as brought disaster to Mr. Sawyer and "the Hon. Crasher" when they attempted to drive home in a phæton after an evening's whist at the Rectory. The horses went at a gallop, but Mr. Sawyer, emboldened by memories of Miss Dove, merely pressed his hat on his head and sat tight. "'Aren't they getting a little bit out of hand?' he asked, hazarding the question in its mildest form, as he recognised Marathon's well-known manner of putting down his head when he meant mischief. 'Only going free,' answered Crasher with the utmost composure, though his cigar was burnt all the way down one side to his lips by the current of air created in the rapidity of their transit. 'Remarkably free—but I like phæton horses to run up to their bits.'" The argument whether a gate they were approaching was open or not was settled by a demonstration that Marathon could jump timber, a fact the Honourable noted with pride before the splinters had come to ground or the detached wheels had stopped rolling.

Having crossed the road, we can look down over the ridge and furrow of the upland pastures to the Billesdon Brook, over Cotterill's Spinney, the Ford Spinney, and further north Forsell's Spinney, named after Mr. Forsell of Winkerdale, Bushby, a staunch supporter of the Fernie Hunt. Cotterill's Spinney is a small triangular copse generally run through on the way from Norton Gorse, which is over the hill beyond the Ford Spinney. This spinney slopes down to the brook on the far side of the valley—a plantation

of young larches with a group of ash trees on the brookside. As its name implies, it is close to a ford over the brook (or River Sence); it is a new spinney planted a few years ago. It also lies on the way from Norton Gorse to Hall's Spinney or Thurnby.

The latter covert is reached after passing through the village of Houghton-on-the-Hill, leaving Forsell's Spinney higher up the valley on the right. Turning to the left at the Uppingham turnpike (the Fernie boundary), passing over Winkerdale Hill, and taking a road to the left through Bushby Village, we reach Thurnby and the covert near it, Sunny Leys, which are just within the Fernie country on the left of the road, in the valley of the small stream flowing from Houghton. Thurnby is one of the great coverts of the Thursday country. A run from it in any direction gives a splendid line: south-west to Norton Gorse, south-east to Glenn Gorse, north-east into Quorn country by way of the Scraptoft Spinneys. The covert, made in Sir Bache Cunard's time and added to by Isaac, is nearly all thorn; it was cleared of most of its large trees two years ago, those remaining being at its southern end near the stream. Its major portion, circular in shape, is composed of thick-set low thorn. Sunny Leys is a long, narrow spinney, chiefly of pine trees. Immediately south-west is Clarke's Bush, and just a mile away in the same direction, the village of Stoughton.

We must now return and take the Houghton Mere road again for Great Stretton. Crossing the Norton road, and once more passing Harris's Spinney, and the so-called Stoughton New Spinneys (now some thirty years old) close to the Gartree Road, we turn to the left on the old highway. The few houses of Great Stretton are on the left of the road, its church on the right. The Stoughton New Spinneys, small plantations of pine trees, are unimportant; but close to the village is Buswell's Spinney, a narrow strip of ash, with a few poplars, in which there is a fox-earth. This has been drawn recently because of depredations on Mr. Buswell's hen-roost and that of his neighbour Mr. Harris, both farmers who have been in the country for many years, and good men to hounds. So far no fox has been found, but the spinney is drawn whenever hounds meet at the village. Crow's Spinney is a small copse visible from the road.

A field track from the village leads due south to Glenn Gorse, the famous old covert that until recently crossed the Harborough turnpike, the greater part of it being on the Stretton side. This is the covert where Nimrod was so scandalised by being asked to contribute a shilling towards the fee paid to several villagers who helped to eject a fox from it. He refused to pay his shilling.

THE FORD SPINNEY

" Fox-hunting," he wrote, " has already lost much of its native wildness, but if men, not hounds, are to find our foxes we must soon leave them to men to kill, as every covert in the country would be surrounded by foot-people and every chance of getting a fox away would be lost." * His prediction seemed likely to come true at the time, and the practice, which was only resorted to on occasions when hounds could not bolt a very awkward fox from this close-set gorse covert, was gradually stopped. The prospect of earning several shillings attracted large crowds to the covert whenever it was likely to be drawn. Glenn village was once prominent in the knitting industry, and when hounds met there the people would leave their stocking-frames and crowd round the covert. Glenn Gorse has had a wonderful record for holding foxes, in spite of its position so close to the main road ; for more than a hundred years it has been drawn many times a season and seldom drawn blank. A famous meet in Quorn days was Oadby Toll Bar, when the Gorse was the first draw. Oadby is just over a mile away, and is rapidly joining on to Leicester, yet Glenn Gorse is still in a huntable country. Dale describes it well in 1903 : " Personally, I delight in a find from Glenn Gorse ; it is so charming a transformation scene. We start from the prosaic high road, along which one of the hateful machines driven by steam is labouring and rattling with a trolley behind it. We edge up a narrow, muddy lane with the covert on the right and a couple of ' This-land-to-be-let-on-building-lease ' sort of suburban fields on the left. There is a scrimmage through a gate, and lo, there stretch before us the green uplands of Leicestershire." † More than ten years have passed and many fields like those mentioned by Dale have justified his description of them ; the builder is already encroaching on the confines of Glenn. Two years ago, the portion of the covert south of the turnpike was cut down, but the lower end towards Great Stretton, which consists of thick gorse and oak trees, is still drawn regularly, and is likely to remain a Fernie covert for many years to come.

Between Glenn Gorse and Stretton are the Stretton Spinneys, which adjoin Stretton Hall. These spinneys are in the direct line from Glenn Gorse to Norton Gorse, and often cause a check, otherwise hounds seldom run through them.

Stretton Hall has been famous in hunting history from the day of the Coplow run to the day when a fox was killed in the housekeeper's room. It is near two of the oldest and most famous coverts in the Harborough country, Glenn Gorse and Glenn Oaks. The Hall is close to the River Sence (here sometimes called the Glenn Brook), and though it is less than two miles from

* " Hunting Tours." † " Fox Hunting in the Shires."

Oadby, it might be ten miles from even a small village; the fields and trees show Leicestershire in all its quiet pastoral beauty. Stretton Hall was formerly the seat of the Hewit family, by whom it was built. It is a large brick mansion surrounded by trees, and from its position—the rising ground on which it stands is over four hundred feet high—it looks over a large part of

AN OLD DOG FOX, GLENN OAKS.

the Monday and Thursday countries. Throsby gives a picture of Captain Hewit who resided there in the middle of the eighteenth century:

"Captain Hewit was long a resident in Leicestershire; and was a Captain of a company in the Leicestershire regiment, under the command of the late Marquis of Granby, in the rebellion of 1745. He was, in his earlier life, considered the polite and accomplished gentleman in the ball and assembly rooms; and his mind was fraught with learning and good sense. In the decline of his life he was considered, by the young, as a queer old fellow: his habits were

original, his dress was peculiar; and his deportment bordering upon rudeness. He was a constant attendant at church, sat among the aldermen, but looked very unlike one. He wore shoe strings (then but little used), red garters below his breeches-knees; a scarlet coat, retaining the fashion of his youth, a cue wig (the aldermen then wore wigs as large as the bottom of a house brush); and a large black ribbon tied round his neck. In the church he never kneeled, disliked singing, and showed not a token of complaisance to those about him; as he came into the church he went out, without a nod or a bend, and always before the congregation, while the clerk was giving out the psalm. He lived in the line of a bachelor till he was upwards of 70 years of age, and then took a wife of the age of 25."

The Hewits were descended from the Leicestershire family of Villiers, and from the O'Neals of Ireland. By the end of the eighteenth century the Hewits had left this old seat, and it was owned by Sir George Robinson. Since then it has seen several changes, its present owner being Lt.-Col. Packe, to whose family it belonged in 1876. Writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, "Septuagenarian" thus describes the end of the great run in February of that year:

"In February, 1876, there was a dramatic finish to a sharp set-to from Noseley with Mr. Tailby's Hounds across a beautiful line of grass nearly to Glenn Gorse. A spent fox entered the Stretton Hall grounds, where Mr. C. Packe, a great authority on pointers and setters, then resided, and crashed through the window of the housekeeper's room, in which the upper servants were having dinner. Consternation was speedily followed by a regular *mêlée* of confusion, for the leading hounds precipitated themselves through the window with as little ceremony as the fox had shown, and savaged him out of existence on the spot. One recalls that the intrusion proved a sore trial to the owner of Stretton Hall, for it was long before the housekeeper's room and its adjuncts resumed their normal atmosphere."

Less than a mile south of Stretton Hall is the village of Glenn on the Harborough turnpike. The houses of Glenn are on either side of the turnpike, and the Sence here crosses the road from the Thursday into the Monday country. The brook flows through the village. A large pleasant village, its appearance is less rural than it was owing to the constant motor traffic on the London road. The red granite church of St. Cuthbert, of which the little church at Great Stretton was a chapel (Great Glenn Church was rebuilt in 1838), is chiefly in the Early English and Decorated styles, with a Norman doorway and an embattled tower. About half a mile from the village along the

road leading to Burton Overy and King's Norton is Glenn Oaks, now owned by Sir Maurice Levy, whose residence, Great Glenn House, is opposite the covert across an intervening valley. Further up this valley lies the village of Burton Overy, and through it flows the second main stream of the Thursday country, the Burton or Norton Brook, a tributary of the Sence. Glenn Oaks looks down over the village; it is the first covert drawn after a meet at Burton

THE RIVER SENCE NEAR GLENN.

Overy. The narrow strip of oak wood—in shape like the letter L, the short portion running alongside the road from Glenn, the long portion a field away from the same road where it turns at right angles towards King's Norton—is one of the most remarkable coverts in Leicestershire. In spite of its being so close to the road on two sides, and of such small extent, Glenn Oaks always holds foxes, and litters of cubs are reared there every year. The covert contains one natural earth, which has been supplemented by two artificial

ones. The first day hounds were there cubbing in 1925, eighteen foxes left covert, three being accounted for. Glenn Oaks looks west to Stretton Hall, and the line is very often across the valley of the Sence to Glenn Gorse. There is no wire, but as the river can only be crossed at the ford, the field generally follow gateways until they reach the opposite slope of the valley. The Sence cannot be jumped on account of its width in places and shelving banks. Field-gates on the line to the ford are marked for the convenience of followers of the Hunt who do not know the country; the gates lead down to the Sence near Stackley House, just north of the Oaks, which used to be let as a hunting box. When looking across the Burton Overy valley to the north-east, the Illston Spinneys can be seen on the skyline. Norton Gorse is, however, the next covert near the road from Glenn to King's Norton, and a very imptortant one.

A turning to the right leads down to Burton Overy village, on the far side of the Burton Brook, the road from Glenn Oaks continuing straight to King's Norton. The former village is a regular meet of the hounds in the Fernie country, and has been under all previous Masters, including those of the Quorn. Glenn Gorse and Glenn Oaks are mentioned as often as any other coverts in Leicestershire by many of the older writers; Nimrod frequently refers to them. No part of Leicestershire has contributed to hunting history more than the strip of country between Glenn and the Coplow. The country round King's Norton is the scene of the great run described by Nimrod in "Hunting Reminiscences," ending with the death of the narrator's horse, Edwin. This run is presumably fictitious, but typical of the best that Leicestershire can show. The description is not approached by any other account of a run in sporting literature, except Nimrod's own in "The Chase, The Road, and The Turf," known as the "Quarterly Run" (it was first published in the *Quarterly Magazine*). A short extract has already been given from the latter in an earlier chapter; here are two from the Norton run:

"Our first fence this day was a flight of rails, with a yawning ditch on the further side, which I thought it was my luck to have the first fly at; but, looking earnestly at the hounds, as every man should do, you know, I never saw young Mr. M——, who came right across me at the fence, and got a nasty sort of a fall (he told me afterwards, he could not hold his mare; if so, all well; if not, *it served him right*). I tried to stop the young thoroughbred one; but he threw up his head, and it was 'no go'; so, thinking my own the more valuable life of the two—I mean more valuable than young Mr. M——'s—I let him go, and all I saw of young Mr. M—— was his mare's belly and his own head, the rest

of his body being under the mare. However I never touched him, I am happy to say, and two others did as I did; but the third was not *quite* so fortunate. He jumped on his head, as he thought, but it was only his hat, as his head had just then slipped out of it. But you know, my dear fellow, these things will happen in our fast country. No joke, you are aware, for a fellow to fall at the first fence, with such a crowd close behind him, all trying to get first, in fact, all jealous as girls."

And towards the end of the run:

"We crossed the brook under Norton-by-Galby, and went straight as a line for Rolleston Wood. 'Ha! ha! *another* ox-fence,' said I to myself, as we rose the hill in Galby field, which being deep and holding took rather tightish hold of the nags. In return, however, I kept a tight hold upon mine, and was delighted to find him so well. 'I'll not have this ox-fence,' said I; 'they are turning to the right, and I'll make for the sheep-pen in the corner.' But there was no such luck for me or my horse. The scent lay nearly right ahead of us, but the hounds, if anything, were bearing to the left. 'Here goes, then, there is nothing else for it'; so catching fast hold of his head I sent him at it manfully; but it had like to have been a case. The ditch was broad and deep, the hedge thick and plashed, and the rail beyond them strong. Neither was this all. There was a considerable fall into the next field, which would have been bad enough had my horse landed on the ridge, but unfortunately he landed in the furrow, and the furrow was deep and sticky. The drop must have been seven feet at the least, and he had a struggle to keep his legs, for he must have cleared more than seven yards in length, or he would not have got over it at all. *It told upon him;* but I soon got him upon a headland, and standing up in my stirrups, took a pull at his head, which recovered him wonderfully before he got to the end of the ground, which was sixty acres or more.

"'*This cannot last long*' I said; 'I wish the fox would die, or that Footpad* would make his appearance.' The latter chance, however, was out. 'He'll go to ground in the Coplow,' I vainly said to myself, 'or at least we may come to a check.' The devil a bit; he never went to the Coplow, but straight away as if for Lozeby Plantations. 'I shall kill the young one,' thought I; but what, my good fellow, could I do?"

On the way to Norton Gorse the Gartree Road is recrossed, half a mile east of Little Stretton. This little village with its small but ancient church, restored in 1899, is in the parish of King's Norton. Hounds sometimes meet in the big field north of the village, the approaches to which are along field-roads with

* His second horse.

IN FULL CRY ABOVE HOUGHTON MERE

gates. Little Stretton is at the south-western end of the upland country which runs north-east to Billesdon, between the Billesdon and Burton Brooks. This upland is similar to Houghton Mere, an unfrequented part of Leicestershire, crossed by roads with gates at frequent intervals. One such road leads from Gaulby through Frisby to Billesdon. There is no wire here; large rolling fields and big fences promise a good line in any direction. Some of the boundary thorn fences and ditches are unjumpable, especially near Norton Gorse; they have been attempted, generally with unfortunate results. These unjumpable fences consist of a rough thorn hedge with a wide blind ditch on one side. They date back a great number of years. The Rev. Cave Humphrey, the sporting Rector of Laughton, who, when he died in 1874 at the age of seventy-three, had hunted in Leicestershire for more than fifty years, could remember the time when in a run from the Marston Hills to Tilton there were only about a dozen fences on the whole line, but they were all parish boundaries, with wide boggy ditches—very awkward places to get over. Some of these fences are shown in the series of pictures of the Quorn Hunt by Alken. It is easy to imagine the country round Norton Gorse at this time; many of the fields to-day are very large and with a few of the smaller fences cleared away parts of it would look much the same as it looked a hundred years ago, especially the undulating meadows on either side of the field-road from Gaulby. There is a small unnamed spinney on the right of the road to King's Norton, a favourite draw in recent years, and then a few fields to the left lead to Norton Gorse, King's Norton being about a quarter of a mile south-east, Gaulby half a mile east. Norton Gorse is on the hillside above a small tributary of the Sence or Billesdon Brook, the valley through which this little stream runs dividing the covert from the Ford Spinney, on the banks of the brook itself.

Norton Gorse is not looking its best at the present time, the central portion of it having been cut down. It is not a large covert, but having always been carefully looked after—Isaac gave much time and thought to its preservation in Fernie's time—it has maintained its reputation as one of the finest Thursday coverts, and might be included among the half-dozen best coverts in the whole of the Fernie country.

Leaving the covert and passing through the village of King's Norton (or Norton-by-Gaulby), we descend into the valley of the Burton Brook. The lofty tower, originally surmounted by a spire, of King's Norton Church, which was built in the eighteenth century, is a striking landmark. The spire was struck by lightning in 1843; it was repaired at a cost of two hundred pounds,

but was struck again in 1850 and totally destroyed. Looking up the valley towards Gaulby, the straggling Gaulby Spinneys can be seen by the side of the brook. The village itself is on the hill beyond King's Norton. It is generally spelt Galby, but the older form of the name as seen on the signposts is more familiar to people who hunt the country. In the same way Glenn looks right to people who have seen it so often on the signposts at many corners in the bridle-roads, and its modern form Glen seems to lack something—like a fox that has lost half his brush. On the opposite slope of the valley to Gaulby is the Black Spinney in Illston Big Field. This spinney, composed of fir trees, has held many foxes in the last few years. When Norton Gorse is drawn blank, which is seldom, the Gaulby Spinneys and Illston Black Spinney come next. There are a few spinneys round Illston Grange, which are run through on the way to Shangton Holt, and the Carlton Bottoms sometimes hold a fox.

These coverts are below the village of Carlton Curlieu, in the third valley, where the Carlton Brook, another tributary of the Sence, runs down from Rolleston past Three Gates and Shangton Holt. Illston-on-the-Hill stands up to the north between the Carlton and Burton Brooks; Carlton Curlieu is south, a mile from Burton Overy, but on the far side of the Carlton Brook. It is a pretty little village with a fine old Elizabethan Hall, the front of which was renovated in the time of Charles II. Carlton Curlieu Manor House is on the old Gartree Road, half a mile north of the village. Tailby resided at Carlton Curlieu before he bought Skeffington Hall.

The Gartree Road emerges from the fields south of Illston, crossing the brook and disappearing again when it joins the road that intercepts it from Three Gates to Carlton Curlieu. We are now in sight of the famous covert Shangton Holt, having explored the first three main valleys of the Thursday country, with the exception of the upper part of the Carlton valley, and the extreme end of the Burton valley, which will be described with the coverts near them, Tamboro Hill, Shangton Holt and the woods of Rolleston, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII

THURSDAY COUNTRY (*continued*)

ROLLESTON AND NOSELEY

"We found in the neighbourhood of Rolleston, and came away with a tremendous scent. Leaving Quenby Hall to the left, the fox ran straight for Ashby Pastures."—GEORGE OSBALDESTON.

SHANGTON HOLT, more than any other covert in the Harborough country, brings back the old days of the Quorn. Squire Osbaldeston dominates the picture, and his horn provides the musical accompaniment.

> "Who is that trumpeter blowing his horn?
> That is the trumpeter coming from Quorn,
> The very worst huntsman that ever was born,"

run some popular lines of the time. But the Squire, while he lifts the instrument constantly to his lips and makes the old wood echo, misses not a sound within the covert. If Furrier gives tongue he is the first to anticipate every stage of the events that follow, and the first to get away, in spite of the jealous hard-riding gentlemen who are ready to forget everything but their own chances of first place. "Always so chaffy" too, conversing with everyone round him, never ceasing to talk in between the toots of his horn; yet the Squire is too quick for the best of them. "There, gentlemen, there they are—I have bred those beauties to please you—ride over them if you can," he was wont to say as he regarded his pack, which was "all of one colour," and the admiration of the most critical.

There were few Noseley Spinneys to tempt a fox to linger round Shangton Holt; they were planted later, with the exception of Noseley Wood and Woolpits Spinney. The Rev. Cave Humphrey could remember a run from Gumley when neither the Noseley Spinneys nor those round Keythorpe were in existence. Vowe's Gorse was specially planted for Osbaldeston. It is hard to say how long Shangton Holt, close to the famous meeting place, Three Gates, had been a famous fox covert—certainly since Meynell's first seasons, possibly throughout Boothby's time as well.

Shangton Holt is at the apex of an angle formed by the junction of the road from Harborough, through Church and Tur Langton, to Rolleston and Tilton, with the road from Carlton Curlieu. The two roads meet at Three Gates, where there is also a turning to Noseley on the right, and another to Illston on the left. The road from Harborough runs along the high ground dividing the valley of the Carlton Brook from the fourth and last main valley in the Thursday country, through which flows the famous Stonton Brook. The brook has its source close to Skeffington, and descends to the Skeffington Vale (the northern end of the valley, between Skeffington and Rolleston), being fed on its way by other small streams, one coming from Tugby, and another joining it in the Vale by Briery Leys Spinney. Skeffington Vale itself is over four hundred feet above sea level, the hills north and south of it rising to well over six hundred, the highest, Skeffington Gap,* being six hundred and seventy-one. The Stonton Brook then passes east of Rolleston, flowing south-east until it turns south-west towards Noseley †; it crosses the Illston–Goadby road, and flows thereafter due south past Noseley Hall and Woods, turning again south-west, and eventually crossing the track of the old Gartree Road towards Shangton. Here it is within half a mile of the Harborough–Tilton road, flowing more or less parallel with it through Stonton Wyville, and then between Church Langton and Langton Caudle, where it turns to the south-east past Thorpe Langton on the last stage of its journey to the Welland, of which it is the only tributary in the Thursday country, except for the Saddington Brook from Knaptoft. The latter enters the Welland at almost exactly the same place, a mile west of Weston-by-Welland. This brook crosses the southern corner of the Thursday country north of Great Bowden. The whole course of the Stonton Brook, except for the last two miles, is through typical High Leicestershire country—a country of great undulating grass fields divided by the boundary hedges of old days, later by the famous oxers, of which there are still remains, and now in addition by very stiff thorn and partly timbered fences. There is very little wire at the present time in this part of the Fernie country, though the red warning boards can be seen along a few of the oxers, where the old ox-rails have been replaced by wire. Most of this wire is now taken down in the hunting season. But as a rule all the fences are jumpable, though so stiff—especially in the Skeffington Vale, and round Sheepthorns—that falls are, and always have been, more

* An uncommon name in Leicestershire. The only other instance is Thistleton Gap at the junction of Leicestershire, Rutland and Lincolnshire.

† For about three miles of its course through the Noseley estate the brook is generally known as the Noseley Brook.

numerous in this part of the country than elsewhere. It takes a bold man and horse to ride across the Skeffington Vale or from Shangton Holt to Sheepthorns.

The little village of Shangton is half-way between Harborough and Tilton, though it is not on the direct road; where this road reaches its nearest point to the Stonton Brook it makes a steep descent, crossing a little stream that flows into the brook from near Shangton. The village is in the valley on the left of the road, and is approached by a field-way through gates. Shangton, with its little thirteenth-century church, is so secluded and out of sight that its existence is not suspected by anyone who does not know the country. Close to the village are the Shangton Spinneys, which sometimes hold a fox. These spinneys are occasionally the cause of a check on the way from the Holt to Sheepthorns, and between them and the latter covert the fences are particularly stiff. Shangton Holt is thickly wooded, chiefly with ash and thorn undergrowth; many of the trees are being cut down at the north end, and there is a clearing at the edge of the covert alongside the Carlton road. If a fox goes away in this direction he generally crosses the valley and the Carlton Brook, and frequently swings to the right, to the Ashlands and Tamboro Hill, over the open country leading away to the Coplow, the summit of which can be seen from the covert. The church of Illston-on-the-Hill, with its low tower, is the only church at all noticeable from the flat table-land when looking north-west, the landscape including a few farms and the large field of plough on the west side of Shangton Holt. Across this field a fox leads hounds on the line to Sheepthorns. The view on the east includes all the Noseley woods and the Hardwicks, which is opposite Shangton Holt at the bottom of a field sloping down from the Harborough road. The road runs on the east side of the covert through two gates which, with a third, give the name to the cluster of farm buildings at the cross-roads.

It will be remembered that the Stonton Brook makes a detour in its course round Rolleston and Noseley, flowing first towards the east and then back towards the west. Rolleston and Noseley Halls are on the high ground that forms a salient in the valley of the Stonton Brook; they are little more than a mile apart, with the by-road from Illston to Goadby between them. Rolleston has the northern and Noseley the southern aspect of the hill. Rolleston looks towards the Coplow, Tilton and the Cottesmore highlands; Noseley towards the old Gartree Road and Stonton Wood, the half circle of the Langton villages round the summit of the Caudle, and, further west, over Hallaton and Horninghold.

Continuing along the road from Harborough by Three Gates, we come to New Inn, opposite one of the entrances to Rolleston. The old farm-house, now called New Inn, was known about 1830 as the Hazlerigg Arms, and the original signboard is still preserved in the billiard-room at Noseley. There is a curious hiding-place in one of the upper rooms called "Cromwell's Hidy Hole"; but, though it is supposed to have been used on various occasions by people who were in danger of capture, there is no story connected with it to explain the origin of the name. A well-known earth-stopper, Wigginton, used to live at the farm in Fernie's time. On the left of the road leading to New Inn a thick belt of covert by the roadside, ending in a small plantation of ash trees close to the building, extends most of the way from Three Gates. This belt, which is one of the Noseley coverts, is known as the New Inn Spinneys. Many foxes have been found here, and New Inn is often mentioned in Tailby's journal, several runs in the neighbourhood ending with a fox going to ground in the spinneys. Most of the trees by the road-side have been recently cut down, but the plantation by the house has been left intact. Some rough covert still remains where the trees have been cleared. The Carlton Brook rises just behind New Inn Spinneys, about a quarter of a mile below the house, immediately beyond which is Illston-on-the-Hill. The brook then passes Three Gates and crosses the Gartree Road by Carlton Curlieu Manor House.

Before entering Rolleston Park, we must turn aside to the Ashlands and Tamboro Hill. A road to the left, opposite the entrance to Rolleston nearer Tilton, leads past Ashlands Long Plantation. This is merely a run through covert, and in Isaac's experience has never held a fox. The Ashlands is a familiar sight to members of the Fernie. The house, which looks over Tamboro Hill and the upper part of the valley of the Burton Brook, was formerly owned by Mr. R. A. Faulkner, and is now the residence of Miss Butler, who has for years been a follower of the Hunt.

Tamboro Hill, one of the best of the Fernie coverts, is on the slope leading down to the brook, west of the house and only a short distance away. The ride is at the top of the hill by the original spinney to which Isaac joined the thorn covert. By the bridle-gate are some oak trees, the thick-set thorn being otherwise unbroken, except by a few trees at the lower end near the stream. On the hillside across the valley is Gaulby, hidden by the trees round it, and, immediately opposite the covert, the village of Frisby-by-Gaulby. From Tamboro a good fox will often take a line to the Coplow and Botany Bay. In the valley about a mile away is a small spinney known as Badger's Spinney,

NOSELEY HALL

in which there is an earth where foxes have sometimes succeeded in getting to ground from Tamboro. The valley has often been the course of the annual point-to-point, the last occasion being in 1925. The Burton Brook rises just below Billesdon at the head of the valley.

The large old-world village that gave its name to the Hunt has remained unspoiled, and except for traffic on the Leicester–Uppingham turnpike there is little to suggest the days of motors and railways. The turnpike itself is not a noisy thoroughfare like the London road through Harborough and only passes through the northern end of the village. Billesdon Church, restored and partly rebuilt in 1862, and the fine old Rectory, are on the branch road that leads from Rolleston. Close by the church a field-road enters the village from Gaulby and Frisby, passing through a succession of gates and running along the ridge that divides the valleys of the Burton Brook and the Sence. The field-road ends at Gaulby, where it joins the road through King's Norton to Glenn. For two miles from Billesdon to Gaulby there is a magnificent view of the Coplow side of the Fernie country, and the two sources of the Sence, or rather the source of the Billesdon Brook, that gives its name to the upper part of the river, rising close to the village, and of the Sence itself that rises by the old encampment near the Coplow. This is one of the typical views of the High Leicestershire grass country, like that obtained from the roads round Marefield, Somerby and Cold Overton; there are the same spacious grass fields and rolling contours. There is no wire here, only fine sporting fences, not too stiff, and acres of grass. Some of the fields are very large, suggesting the earlier unenclosed appearance of the landscape as seen in the Alken prints.

Returning to the Tilton road and entering Rolleston Park by the gates on the Billesdon side of New Inn, the woods of Rolleston can be seen lying along the skyline of the high ground. The small spinney known as Blenheim Spinney is in a valley near the gates. A long road leads over the undulating park to the hill on which stands Rolleston Hall, now the seat of Lord Michelham.

The Hall is famous in hunting history as the residence of Mr. Henry Greene, who was Master of the Quorn from 1841 to 1847, and was up to that time the first Leicestershire man to take the Mastership, with the exception of Mr. Boothby, who hunted the country before the Quorn received its title. The little church and hamlet of Rolleston are close to the Hall; the church was rebuilt in 1900, when the Hall was re-fronted. A large fish pond is east of the Hall, surrounded by gardens and woodlands. After we have followed a bridle-road past the fish pond, and ascended the slope of a field beyond

the woods round the Hall, Rolleston Wood comes into view in the valley of the Stonton Brook; a streamlet runs from the wood into the brook, which is only a field or two away. This large wood is the first draw after a meet at Rolleston Hall. The valley leads directly into the Skeffington Vale, and a fox will often break away for Skeffington Gap, over the formidable fences of the Vale. Due north, nearly two miles away, is Skeffington Hall, now the residence of Captain George Tailby. Less than a mile from Rolleston Wood is Briery Leys Spinney, a little copse in the Vale below the turnpike. On the far side of the brook is Goadby village, with Keythorpe Wood behind

ROLLESTON FISH POND.

it, beyond the boundary of the Thursday country. The proximity of the Noseley Woods often tempts a fox to leave on the south side of Rolleston Wood, and once he gets into Noseley the prospect of a long run fades away; it may be some hours before he can be persuaded to leave. Close to the wood on the Noseley side is the second large covert, called Rolleston Dingle, though the greater part of it is on the Noseley estate. It is a difficult place to draw because, owing to its formation, a fox may slip away unnoticed. The Dingle climbs the steep sides of a valley leading down from the high ground to Rolleston Wood. The upper part of the covert is larch, with ash on the lower slopes. Little more than a quarter of a mile south of the Dingle is the road from Illston to Goadby and the lodge gates of Noseley Hall.

A striking tribute to the beauty of Noseley was paid by Quartermaster Symonds before the Battle of Naseby. He was billeted there on June 5th, 1645 : " H. W. *et moy, avec Col Sm.* at Noseley, Sir Arthur Haslerig's Parish : not above two cottages besides his : a sweet place : and a neat church, the windows very old, and many old coats in there, and old words in yellow under every orate."

Noseley in June moved a soldier to make this comment in an otherwise terse journal of the days' marches, a comment which does not even betray the fact that Sir Arthur Hesilrige was one of the staunchest of the Republicans, Colonel of the " Lobsters," a regiment of cuirassiers so-called from the completeness of their armour, then fighting for the Parliament. This great soldier was " the first that made any impression on the King's horse," * fighting in the south and west under Waller. During the latter part of the Civil War he was governor of Newcastle. He was also one of the five Members of Parliament whose impeachment precipitated the Civil War. Sir Arthur Hesilrige remained true to his republican principles ; he refused to sit in the House of Peers when Cromwell became a king except in name, and after the Restoration, having tried to rally some of the old officers to make an attempt to restore the lost Commonwealth, he was committed to the Tower, where he died in 1660.

The Manor of Noseley came to the Hesilrige family through Isabel Heron, who married Thomas Hesilrige of Fawdon in the county of Northumberland. The name is supposed to have been derived from Hazel-Ridge, the coat of arms being three hazel leaves, although it has often been stated that the family was descended from Roger de Hesilrige, who came to England with William the Conqueror ; there is, however, no genealogical evidence of this descent. Hill states that " Thomas de Hesilrige was the third son of William and Joan Hesilrige, who greatly advanced his estate, for, by his wife, he not only gained Noseley, but also the Manor of Gilmorton." Noseley was once a large village ; it disappeared after an outbreak of plague, but, if Symonds is correct in stating that there were only two cottages when he saw it, this must have been earlier than the outbreak towards the end of the year 1645, when Skeffington and other Leicestershire villages were abandoned. Traces of the village can be distinctly seen in parts of the fields known as Big Church Yard, Little Church Yard, and Gunpowder Close, the last name referring to some remains of the houses which were blown up as untenantable and useless. Depressions in the ground mark the streets, and the plan of an extensive

* Clarendon.

village can be followed in the fields north-east of the Hall; what was once the main street runs north and south, the site overlooking the Marston Hills. Although some of the ancient houses of Noseley may have been abandoned after an outbreak of plague in the seventeenth century, the disappearance of the greater part of the old village, and certainly of the parish church, dates back much earlier. In 1273, Sir Anketin de Martival, then Lord of the Manor of Noseley, founded the present church as a chantry chapel, and it was enlarged and made a collegiate church by his son Roger de Martival, Bishop of Salisbury. After the middle of the fifteenth century there is no mention of the parish church, which stood in Church Close (or Big Church Yard) a quarter of a mile from the collegiate church next the Hall. The use of the parish church seems to have been discontinued in favour of the collegiate church. Leland, writing about 1530, says: "As I rode from Staunton I saw two miles off Noseley village, where is a Collegiate Paroch Chirch of three priests, two clerks, and four choristers." The college founded by Roger de Martival was dedicated to the Ascension and the Assumption, but after its dissolution, the church, which is now the private chapel of Noseley Hall, was dedicated to St. Mary. The ancient stone structure of Perpendicular architecture, with its long embattled walls, consists of a chancel and nave; originally it had a tower on the north side, but this was destroyed in the eighteenth century. The simple interior of the chapel has a quiet dignity, the light falling from the east window on the monuments of the Hesilriges—the soldier of the Civil War in his armour lies between his two wives, the finely-sculptured figures of his children kneeling at the base of the tomb. At the west end of the chapel the memorial window to the Lady Hazlerigg who died in 1883 diffuses a glow of colour about the walls. Without, the ivy climbs round the eight narrow windows on either side, the leaves rustling in the wind blowing among the trees and over the green lawn and park that slopes down to the valley of the Stonton Brook.

Noseley Hall, the seat of Sir Arthur Grey Hazlerigg,* the Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire, is close to the chapel, separated from it by the drive. A very interesting engraving of Noseley Hall from a drawing by Throsby is reproduced in the second volume of his "Leicestershire." The Hall itself looks much as it does now, except for a gable in the centre (it had already been partly rebuilt when the drawing was made about 1793), the tower of the chapel is shown, but the place looks bare, without woods except for some small trees in the field opposite the house, and Throsby's description reads: "The Hall is now

* The spelling of the name was altered by Royal license in 1818.

without those pleasing appendages which it formerly had : the woody scenery with which it was once embowered, is no more ; many of those friendly ornaments which once sheltered it from storms and tempest, the axe has removed for ever." The present plantations and woods, except for Noseley Wood and Woolpits Spinney, previously mentioned, have been planted since that date. The pond or lake beyond the lawn has been enlarged ; in Throsby's drawing it appears as a small field pond. There are some tall pine trees in the park at the eastern end of the Hall, where the Hunt assemble when the meet is at Noseley, and on the terrace ; these and the fine old elms on the hillside escaped the axe in Throsby's day. But Noseley is everywhere well wooded now, the Hall being concealed by trees all the way along the drive that leads up to it from the ancient lodge gates on the by-road to Goadby.

An atmosphere of the past pervades Noseley : suits of armour stand against the pillars in the entrance hall, and among the fine portraits are those of Cromwell and Sir Arthur Hesilrige, both by Walker, and Monmouth by Lely. There is also a portrait of the first Baronet by Meriveldt, and a very beautiful painting of a child, Mistress Mary Hesilrige, by an artist whose name is not known.

Turning from the Hall to the coverts that surround it, there are six that are well-known now, and one that no longer exists. Everyone who hunts in the Fernie country is familiar with Noseley Wood, Coney Hill, Coronation Wood, Cottonsfield Spinney, Dog Kennels and Woolpits. Tailby frequently mentions the last, and one that is no longer familiar, Noseley Gorse. The others he generally refers to as the Noseley plantations. Woolpits and Dog Kennels are in the valley south of the Hall, and both contain oaks of great age. Woolpit is not an uncommon, nor a local name—there is the village of Woolpit in Suffolk—and its probable derivation is Wolf-pit. There is an old record of three hundred wolves having been supplied annually to King Edgar by Constantine, King of Wales, for their skins, and of the carcasses being buried at Wolf-pit in Cambridgeshire. At a later date the destruction of wolves was vigorously carried on until the country was clear of them—they made their last struggle against extermination on the Yorkshire Wolds in the reign of Henry VII—and the places of their interment no doubt resulted in Wolf-pit being a common name in England at the time, if, as is probable, a record was kept of the number killed and the carcasses were collected and buried locally. As the term " fighting the wolves " was often used to describe the conditions of tenure of land as late as the middle of the fifteenth century, they must have been fairly numerous. Noseley

Gorse was a patch of covert on the hillside regularly drawn by Tailby when he was hunting round the Noseley plantations.

Noseley Wood, the largest and oldest of the present coverts, lies south-west of the Hall, on the western spur of the hill, from which a streamlet runs into the brook. South-east of the wood is the Stonton valley; north of it the ground slopes to a hollow between the wood and Coney Hill, in which is an old gravel pit. Many litters of cubs have been reared in the fox-earth in this gravel pit, sheltered by the surrounding plantations. In the spring twilight the cubs can be seen playing at the entrance of the earth when the moon rises above Coronation Wood and Coney Hill. The keeper at Noseley, whose hut is on the green slope below Noseley Wood, where young pheasants are reared, witnessed an incident of fox family life that few are privileged to see. The vixen approached the earth where the cubs were waiting with a rabbit in her mouth, escorted by the dog fox; he came with her up to the entrance of the earth, watched her lay down the rabbit before the cubs, and then, having seen the family provided with their supper, went back into the woods. One of the Noseley vixens became famous, and is now stuffed in a glass case in Noseley Hall. Sir Bache Cunard describes the run that ended her career, as quoted by Mr. Costobadie in his book:

February 5th, 1879.—Met at Rolleston. Found at Crow Spinney the bob-tailed vixen of Noseley. She came away just in front of me, raced through Coney Hill and Noseley up to Stonton Wood, on through Glooston and by Hallaton village up to Blaston, then on nearly to Medbourne, turning towards Slawston. She went to ground in a culvert under the railway between Slawston Covert and Weston, just where the bridle-road from Medbourne to Welham and Cranoe goes under the railway. Time 1 hour and 15 minutes. I put one of the kennel terriers to ground and it never appeared again. The 1st whip, Sheppard, after hunting, stayed all night trying to get the terrier out, and the following morning his kennel boy went to ground 25 yards with a rope tied to his legs and a dark lantern and found water. The weight of the embankment had caused the culvert to sink in the middle; with a pole he recovered the body of the fox, but the terrier was never found. I had this fox's body stuffed and mounted in a case and presented it to Sir Arthur Hazlerigg. The vixen was known to have had 11 litters."

Tailby had an anecdote he was fond of recounting, when discussing the subject of changing foxes during a run. A bob-tailed fox in another shire—

distinctly seen at the covert-side—was said to have provided the run of the season, eventually going to ground. Unfortunately, when it was dug out an hour or two later, it had grown a full brush!

West of Noseley Wood is Coronation Wood, and beyond it is Cotton's Field, in which is the Cottonsfield Spinney. Coney Hill Spinney lies north of these two and the wood, and extends to the Goadby road. West of all these is the Hardwicks, on the boundary of the Noseley estate, below

ROLLESTON DINGLE.

Shangton Holt. The Hardwicks, which belongs to Sir Geoffrey Palmer, is one of the oldest coverts in Leicestershire, and is frequently mentioned by Osbaldeston. All these coverts are plantations of small trees, some pine, with oak and ash. They form a chain of spinneys from which a fox cannot easily be dislodged, but once clear of them, if he does not pause at Shangton Holt, he may head for the open country towards Norton Gorse or Sheepthorns.

We must now cross the valley of the Stonton Brook south of Noseley, and taking the old Gartree Road—here a very rough track, in places lost among the fields—ascend the opposite hill to Stonton Wood.

The course of the Gartree Road leads over the hill on which is Stonton Wood, and down the other side to the little village of Glooston, which is on a tributary of the Stonton Brook flowing from Keythorpe. The brook and this stream, which joins it at Stonton Wyville, almost surround the hill. Stonton Wyville is due south of the promontory, Glooston is on the east, and the road running north from the latter village to Goadby passes between the brook and the stream just east of Noseley, where they are half a mile apart. The hill is one of the most remote spots in Leicestershire. The wood, chiefly composed of thorn and ash, is owned by Mr. George Brudenell of Deene Park, Northants; it is one of the best Fernie coverts,* in a good country with fences that are fairly stiff, but not to be compared with the fences in the Skeffington Vale. If a fox goes past Glooston Wood, east of the road to Goadby, the line may lead to Hallaton and Horninghold in the Friday–Saturday country; or he may take a line west over the brook towards Shangton Holt. All the way across the valley from the Shangton Spinneys and up to the summit of the hill the Gartree Road can hardly be traced, even as a cart-track; but along the south-west side of the wood its course is marked by a broad and very rough grass way, leading to the descent to Glooston. Here the old track passes between hedges, becoming narrow and bramble-grown, but more clearly defined, and here, in summer, when the sun burns the hard and broken ground, is a place where butterflies and birds have the country to themselves, as they have had it for centuries. The wild roses climbing through the brambles under the ash trees light up the landscape with their pale bloom, flushed with gold and delicate pink in the sun. The warm air is redolent, not with the scent of roses, but with that of other wayside flowers and the smell of baked earth. The roses perhaps lure the butterflies with a scent too delicate for any but these frail creatures fluttering restlessly from bloom to bloom, meadow browns with the sun gilding the minute tracery of their under-wings as they poise on the rose petals. While watching in this quiet lane one may see a little owl alight on the ground. Often heard, but rarely seen, the little owls are strangely friendless; the gamekeeper watches for them in the woods, they prey on the fledglings of small birds in the hedges, and they walk the earth as if they owned it. The large head with its great eyes is thrust forward, the two small legs are planted firmly on the ground, and the almost complete absence of a tail gives the bird a curiously human aspect. Should one appear, it is only for a moment; the little owl crosses the path as

* Assheton Smith used to say that the foxes of Stonton and Glooston were the stoutest in Leicestershire.

THE GARTREE ROAD NEAR GLOOSTON

if searching for something, and disappears among the brambles. The lane leads down the hill, the thorn bushes on either side almost meeting and blocking the way. At every step butterflies rise up and dance ahead through the sunlight, until at last the narrow path widens out and Glooston village comes in sight. The small tributary of the Stonton Brook crosses the road where a turning on the right leads to Stonton Wyville and another on the left to Goadby. The Blue Bell Inn, one of the oldest in England, is just beyond the cross-roads, and Glooston Church stands a little back from the village on the right.

The old sign of the " Blue Bell " is the only distinction marking the small square house as an inn ; the entrance is approached down a steep slope, and the little bar-parlour is below the level of the road. The high thatched roof is dark with weather stains, and in the summer heat so dry that it seems as though a wind would blow it away in chaff and dust. This inn has been in the Neal family for over a hundred years—the present owner being an aged woman. The few cottages composing the village are more recent ; the church was taken down and carefully restored, part of it being renewed altogether in 1866. It was struck by lightning in 1925, and one of the many heads which ornament its outer wall was disfigured. One of these heads represents the Earl of Cardigan, sculptured at the time the church was restored. Less than a mile from Glooston in the direction of Medbourne is the village of Cranoe. Glooston and Cranoe are both mentioned in Domesday and, according to the Itinerary of 1280, these two villages, with Stonton and Welham, formed one town. The name Cranoe is supposed to have been derived from Cran-hoe (Crane-hill), both Saxon words, on account of its proximity to the marshes of the Welland Valley. *Crean* is an old Leicestershire word for heron.

Glooston Wood, a large part of which has recently been cut down, is the last covert on the east side of the Thursday country. It is about half a mile from Glooston village above the little stream already mentioned. Except for a few oaks on the crest of the hill, the covert now consists of low thorn ; on its eastern side there is a steep gully. Glooston Wood is often drawn on Saturdays, and Keythorpe Wood on Thursdays, the coverts being really neutral to both countries.

The road from Glooston to Stonton Wyville leads past Crossburrow Hill, on which is Dent's Spinney, a small oak wood looking across to Langton Caudle over the road from Stonton to Hallaton. After a short distance this road joins the Glooston road, and a turning to the right leads over the brook into Stonton Wyville, the by-road ending at the village. Stantone of Domesday, afterwards called Staunton Wyville and Staunton Brudenell, from

the two families who were at different times Lords of the Manor (the older name having been retained), is at the junction of the two tributaries of the Stonton Brook, one coming from Shangton, the other from Glooston. There is a small inn called the " Fox and Hounds " which provides good beer and in its humble way does good business. Except for the church there is nothing of interest in this secluded village of plain red brick cottages. The church has been much patched up and renovated, the original tower having been replaced by an open gable at the west end ; a curious feature is the north wall

STONTON WYVILLE.

of the nave, built entirely of pebbles. In the church are the tablets and monuments of the Brudenells. The monument to Thomas Brudenell bears an interesting inscription : " In memory of the Honble. Major General Thomas Brudenell of Stanton Wivell, Co. Leicester, where his ancestors had long resided in good reputation and splendour, eldest son of Sir Richard Brudenell, Esq. . . . Chancellor of the Diocese of Lichfield. Having been generously educated at Oxford and Lincoln's Inn, he left the law to study the art of war in Holland ; and coming over with the late King William, of glorious memory, when Prince of Orange, Anno 1668, being Colonel in a regiment of foot ; he attended him in the reduction of Ireland, Anno 1690. Afterwards commanding a regiment

of Marines, he went with Admiral Russell, now Earl of Oxford, into the Straits, in assistance of the Spaniards against France; and in the present war for recovering Spain to the House of Austria. Being a Brigadier General, he commanded another regiment under the Duke of Schomberg, in Portugal. At the siege of Badajos, under his successor the Earl of Galway, he miraculously escaped a cannon ball, which killed three officers who sat with him in his tent as he sat at dinner, besides four servants and two sentries. He was at the proclaiming of Charles III at Madrid, Anno 1706; and being made a Major General, marched back to Barcelona, where the disagreeableness of the climate, the heat and fatigues of war, and a bullet continuing in his body ever since the Battle of the Boyne, caused him to languish a year and a half, till returning for England, he died at Gibraltar, Aug. 30, 1707, and was interred between two guns on the platform of the South bastion there, much regretted for his extraordinary qualifications and agreeable conversation." Of the Wyville family, the most celebrated member is Robert de Wyville, Bishop of Salisbury, who succeeded Roger de Martival of Noseley. The latter had been Archdeacon of Leicester, and was Bishop of Salisbury from 1315 to 1329. Both Bishops are buried in Salisbury Cathedral. The last male heir of the Wyvilles died in 1494, and his niece and heir having no children, the Manor was alienated to Sir Robert Brudenell. At a later date the Earl of Cardigan, of Balaclava fame, was the Lord of Stonton Wyville.

The Stonton Brook crosses the Glooston road and flows eastward round Langton Caudle. The brook is jumpable in places—it has been and is jumped occasionally on the lower part of its course—but it widens out considerably near the Caudle, and elsewhere its banks are treacherous and often shelving. It is generally crossed by the bridge at Stonton, or by a ford south of the Caudle.

We now take the road to Tur Langton past Croxfield Spinney—a plantation on the right, beyond which, in the fields, is the spring known as King Charles's Well. After passing through Tur Langton village, the last covert of the Thursday country (except for Langton Caudle and some small spinneys round the Langtons, described in the next chapter) comes into sight on the hillside below Carlton Clump—Sheepthorns. The trees of Carlton Clump, which is as notable a landmark as the Coplow, stand out against the sky, close to Kibworth Hall, the residence of Captain Jack Bellville. A mile to the west is Kibworth Harcourt, and the same distance north-east, the village of Shangton. Sheepthorns lies in one of the stiffest parts of the Fernie country. The fences can be seen from the road stretching away up the gradual slope of the hillside—strongly plashed thorn hedges, generally

with a ditch and often strengthened with posts and rails. Away to the west is Kibworth Mill, close to which Hugh Owen was killed. Many bad falls have occurred in this bit of country. Sheepthorns is a square covert of low thorn with some pine trees in the centre. " It is an extraordinarily thick little covert," writes Dale, " of which I have heard it said that its growth is so close that while hounds are searching underneath, the fox can run about on the tops of the bushes." Sheepthorns is well preserved ; it is as perfect a thorn covert as can be found in Leicestershire. The covert, which dates back to the early days of the Quorn, was one of the first drawn by Tailby in 1856, and has maintained its reputation ever since. The usual line of a fox is over the hill by Carlton Clump—five or six fences coming in quick succession before the top of the hill is reached—and then to Shangton Holt or Carlton Curlieu and on towards Norton Gorse or Glenn. If a fox gets away south of the covert, the Harborough turnpike is soon crossed and the line leads over the Monday country ; but Shangton Holt, the Carlton Bottoms, and the valleys of the Carlton and Burton Brooks are more likely to be the order of the day, and those who ride straight from Sheepthorns may there pride themselves that they are crossing as stiff a country as Leicestershire can show.

IN FULL CRY FROM SHEEPTHORNS

CHAPTER IX

THE LANGTONS

" On yon proud eminence where Langton stands,
That yields a prospect of the richest lands."

WOTY.

NO county in England has a group of villages comparable to the Langtons. And no name preserves what Longinus has called " the echo of a great mind " so clearly as the name these five villages share between them. Walter de Langton, Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry in the reign of Edward I, was born at West Langton. He was Lord Treasurer of England and much favoured by the King. On the death of Edward I he conveyed the King's body from Scotland to Waltham, one of the last stages on the long journey to Westminster. Walter de Langton had many enemies, slanderous charges against him causing the Pope to cite him to appear before the Papal Court; but after two years he was pronounced innocent. He was imprisoned in the reign of Edward II for having, during the late King's lifetime, " gravely reproved the Prince for his misdemeanours and shortened his waste of coyne by a frugal moderation," though he was later restored to Royal favour on the intercessions of the Pope and " in faint sort reconciled." Further intrigues against him, however, finally led to his excommunication. A somewhat sombre figure—yet in spite of the disasters which darkened the last years of his life, he died leaving a considerable fortune—Walter de Langton is best remembered as a great benefactor to the see of Lichfield, and it is probable that he helped to beautify the churches of Church and Thorpe Langton, with both of which he is associated by tradition. It is recorded of his work at Lichfield that " he found his cathedral mean and left it magnifical."

The name Langton dates back to the time of the Conqueror, when Hugh de Grentemesnil, a powerful Norman Baron who landed in England with William I, is mentioned in Domesday as Lord of the Manor of Langitone, having been rewarded for his valiant conduct in the field with about

seventy lordships in the county of Leicester, besides other lands in Northampton and elsewhere. The origin of the name Langitone is obscure; for the fact that the family of Langton held lands in the parish together with other families at a later date has no connection with the original grant of the Manor of Langitone to Hugh de Grentemesnil. They may have taken their name from West Langton where they resided, and where the Bishop of Lichfield was born. The connection of the Manor with the families of Braibroke and Latimer carries its history up to the time of Walter de Langton. Robert de Braibroke, who built Braybroke Castle in the reign of King John, purchased the Manor of Langton in 1210. In the time of Henry III it passed by marriage to Sir William de Latimer, through Christiana de Furnivell, widow of Henry de Braibroke, Sheriff of Northampton. The King was guardian of her two grand-daughters, the elder of whom was her heir, and by his command they were married to Sir William and Sir John de Latimer. While both the Latimers were with Prince Edward in the Holy Land, where they took part in the siege of Acre, the King and Christiana de Furnivell died, and Sir William was permitted to return to England to claim his estates, which were seized by his kinsman John de Braibroke. About this time the Langton family are mentioned as having property at Langton, though the Latimers were Lords of the Manor until nearly a century later. It was subsequently divided and passed through many changes of ownership, too complicated to follow here. John de Langton is said to have made a road in 1282; and Walter de Langton, consecrated Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry in 1296, received a grant of free warren at West Langton in 1306. The two churches associated with his name, at Church and Thorpe Langton, are just a mile apart. The first, dedicated to St. Peter, is the mother church of the five villages.

The names of the five Langtons were originally Langton, East Langton, Thorpe-juxta-Langton, West Langton, and Thirlyngton. The third is now Thorpe Langton and the last Tur Langton. There is no longer a village at West Langton, which consists only of Langton Hall, the residence of Mr. Harry Mills, and formerly of Hugo Meynell and "Prince" Boothby. The largest of the villages is Tur Langton, on the road from Kibworth Harcourt to Glooston, where it crosses the road to Three Gates and Tilton. Nearly a mile south-east of Tur Langton is Church Langton, also at cross-roads on the Tilton road, one of which leads to East Langton, within half a mile of Church Langton. This village is just off the road from Kibworth Harcourt to Welham, and immediately south of it is East Langton Station on the Midland Railway. West Langton Hall is close to the Kibworth–Welham road, half a mile from

East Langton towards Kibworth. Thorpe Langton is on the same road, three-quarters of a mile away in the direction of Welham. The four villages (omitting West Langton Hall) form a rather extended half-circle round the west side of Langton Caudle, the down-like hill that rises above the Welham Flats; if Tur Langton were a little more to the east the half circle would be more regular, but, as they are, the villages appear like a chain round the Caudle's western slopes when viewed from the hill. There is no better place from which to view them and all the Fernie country at the same time. The Langtons are the

LOOKING SOUTH FROM LANGTON CAUDLE.

centre of a panorama extending to five counties: the southern half of Leicestershire, part of Northampton, and the borders of Warwickshire, Rutland and Huntingdon.

Langton Caudle is an undulating rounded hill, like a part of the Wiltshire Downs transferred to Leicestershire; its slopes are steep, and in the hollows by which they are furrowed, particularly on its south side, are rough straggling coverts. The largest is a wooded coombe descending in a south-easterly direction to within half a mile of the Stonton Brook. The highest point of the hill—four hundred feet—is its northern promontory, immediately above Stonton Wyville. A little further to the east, beyond a narrow valley, rises

Crossburrow Hill (on which is Dent's Spinney), another eminence of four hundred feet. On the western slope of the Caudle is a thick square covert just above the field track from Stonton. Ascending the hill by a ride past this covert, the plateau at the top is reached, where the wind sweeps over the grass, and parts it and twists it about as though a gigantic broom scoured the hillside. The sheen of blown grass to leeward, in the path of the gusts coming from the hollows up to the plateau above, swirls round its summit and vanishes against

LOOKING NORTH FROM LANGTON CAUDLE.

the sky, the hillside appearing light or dark as the grass turns under the capricious hand that seems to guide the broom. The old Caudle smiles or frowns while the grass sings in the wind, and a low murmur like the sea drones among the thorn trees. The colour is sombre, but when the scarlet and white of the Hunt lights up the hill, and hounds race across it, the wide background and distant prospect round them make a picture that is never forgotten. The Hunt may be there some time if the fox dodges about from one covert to another, and their enjoyment of the view is compensation. It does not, however, keep out the cold; restless fretting horses, rebellious hats, and an

impatience to be gone are the usual accompaniments of a long wait on the Caudle.

When hounds do get away there is as fine a hunting picture as can be seen in Leicestershire. The fox may be viewed across the valley by the brook; down the hill go the hounds, their white sterns disappearing a moment between the folds of the ground until the pack is clear and streams away over the lower slopes. The sharp notes of the horn wind about the hill, and the sound of galloping horses beats a steady rhythm that grows louder and faster as black, scarlet and white flicker down the long descent, the field bunching together and crowding at the gate by the grass track to Stonton. They file through the gate and spread out over the meadows, past the Langtons and away to the Tilton road. Far off, a little streak of white, are the hounds. Every incident of the chase can be followed: the first flight crossing the fields over fence after fence, the empty saddle of a runaway horse, the obstinate refuser left behind, turning again and again at an awkward place, its rider a solitary spot of scarlet, agitated by impatience changing to despair; for there is no time to linger when hounds are racing towards Shangton Holt or Noseley and the Skeffington Vale. The dust of motors on the Tilton road fades away, a few straggling road-riders can still be seen, wondering in which direction hounds have gone, and then all are lost to sight. The Caudle resumes its murmuring converse with the wind, unbroken by other sounds; only a peewit rises from the grass and circles above the thorn trees.

We can now turn to the landscape, to the " coloured counties " seen from the hill.

Looking south over the wooded hollow, the nearest village, just to the right of the trees at the top of the coombe which break the horizon, is Thorpe Langton, easily recognised by the low spire of its church. Beyond the village is Gallow Hill and Foxton. Market Harborough is hidden by a rise of ground; a faint haze of smoke and a few of the houses of Great Bowden help to place it on the map. East Langton is also concealed among the trees except for a glint on the roofs of its houses. Far away is Naseby spire, beyond the Marston Hills in Northampton, while further to the south-west de Trafford's Gorse can be plainly seen marking the eastern spur of the Hothorpe Hills. Away beyond them, hardly traceable against the sky, a film of blue along the horizon carries the panorama to the borders of Warwickshire. Turning again to the south-west, Gumley Wood stands out in the middle distance leading to John Ball and the telegraph poles of the Welford turnpike on the western horizon, the tower of Church Langton rising in the foreground, due west of the Caudle. Along

the valley between the Langtons and the Caudle flows the Stonton Brook, a silver thread encircling the hill. To the right of the church tower is Tur Langton spire, with Carlton Clump beyond it. Shangton village is hidden, but Shangton Holt and the farm-house at Three Gates lead the eye northward. Just over a mile away is Stonton Wood, backed by the woods of Noseley, with Skeffington Hall on the horizon; north-east is the Rutland border, beyond Goadby, Keythorpe Wood and Moor Hill. On the northern slope of the Caudle there is some rough gorse covert, which is a favourite lie for foxes.

THE WELHAM FLATS FROM THE CAUDLE.

Crossburrow Hill, on which is Dent's Spinney, faces this covert, on the far side of a narrow valley, with Glooston Wood further away.

While tracing the various landmarks up to this point, we have walked along the western and northern slopes of the Caudle, a distance of about a quarter of a mile; we must now turn back along its eastern slope, looking over the Friday–Saturday country. The village of Cranoe is north-east, its red houses climbing the low hillside above the Welham Flats, to which it owes its name of Crane-hill; this part of the Welland Valley is a fine strip of level country, but the fences are unfortunately wired. The Welham Flats, so-called after the village of Welham through which the river passes, are on the border of the Woodland Pytchley, the river being the Hunt boundary. The road to Hallaton winds past Cranoe along the northern edge of the Flats. Slawston covert can

be seen beyond Cranoe, with the white windmill sharply outlined against the trees, about two miles away; Nevill Holt is on the skyline beyond. South-east, beyond the Welland, is the country of the Woodland Pytchley, the distance receding towards the borders of Huntingdon. Due south is the Pytchley country, a level horizon with the fields clearly outlined as on a large-scale map. The southern view is remarkable for the absence of any large woods, except those round East Carlton Hall, now the residence of Mr. Mark Firth who once lived at Wistow Hall. We have now reached the wooded coombe again and the middle distance is hidden, only the horizon appearing above the trees.

Before leaving the Caudle, while looking down the rough wooded slope, the tangle of thorn and bramble calls to mind a story told by Mr. Hanbury, the Rector of Church Langton, and recorded by him in the history of his work at Church Langton, referred to at the end of this chapter. The story concerns two dogs which were buried alive on Langton Caudle, about 1750, by the keeper then in charge of it, apparently through spite against their owner. The poor creatures were walled up with stones and thorn branches in a hollow place on the hill. It is a melancholy story, but well told:

"Day after day the dogs were heard in this place, with the howling barking noise of dogs that were lost. Some people resorted to find them out, and wondered it was to no purpose, for nobody could suspect the dogs were under ground; and thus after calling and whistling them, and seeking them for some time, returned, amazed that lost dogs should continue so long in that place; but a sight of none could ever be had. The noise was fancied to come sometimes from one quarter, sometimes from another; and when they came near the place they were in, they ceased howling, expecting their deliverance was at hand. I myself heard them ten days after they had been buried; and seeing some people at a distance, I enquired what dogs they were. 'They are some dogs that are lost, Sir,' said they; 'they have been lost some time.' I concluded only some poachers had been there early in the morning, and by a precipitated flight had left their dogs behind them. In short the howling and barking of these dogs was heard for nearly three weeks, when it ceased. Mr. Wade's dogs were missing, but he could not suspect those to be his; and the noise ceasing, the thoughts, wonder and talking about them soon also ceased. Some time after a person being amongst the bushes where the howling was heard discovered some disturbed earth, and the print of men's heels jamming it down again very close; and seeing Mr. Wade's servant he told him he thought something had been buried there. 'Then,' said the man,' it is our dogs, and they have been buried alive; I will go and fetch a spade, and will

find them, if I dig all Caudle over.' He soon brought a spade and upon removing the top earth, came to the black thorns, and then to the dogs, the biggest of which had eaten the loins and greatest share of the hind parts of the little one."

This tale is in keeping with the Caudle at its dreariest, when dead leaves fill its hollows, rain drives over its bare summit, and there is an eerie sadness in the note of the wind through the grass.

But though it can be desolate in winter, in summer down by the Stonton Brook a more idyllic pastoral scene would be hard to find. There is a white-railed foot-bridge over the stream near Thorpe Langton, above a shallow ford leading to a meadow on the slopes of the Caudle. A flock of sheep passes over this narrow bridge—the sheep-dog driving them up to the rails, leaping round them as they crowd together to get across—and the shepherd mounted on a pony splashes through the ford. The sun gives a dazzling brilliance to the white rails and the shorn backs of the sheep, the rich toned reflections in the water below are broken by the splashing of the pony's feet and then return as the ripples fade away. The blue sky is reflected with a deeper intensity in all the shadows, and a soft grey veils the distance, the summit of the Caudle merging in the haze. When the shepherd and his dog have gone, and the sheep settle down to graze, the countryside is so still that the flight of a large dragonfly—that whir of wings which can sometimes be heard —has an almost startling suddenness. The gnats dancing above the stream are tuneful as though minute stringed instruments played above the water, and the murmur of the stream itself blends all these small sounds in one dreamy monotonous rhythm.

The hush that falls at noon of a summer day is like a prelude to the reawakening of life, as though the earth itself slept, drowsy after the bringing forth of all the restless life that moves upon its surface. A strange power reigns in the stillness, holding the forces of nature under its sway. Of old, men dreaded this hour, the hour when Pan might meet them on the hill or in the forest, when they might hear him playing on his pipes as the sun climbed to the zenith at noon-day. On the slopes of the Caudle the sheep are resting, the thorn trees stand above their circles of shadow, even the dragon-flies disappear ; but the brook runs on with its swirling eddies, lifting the green weeds upon its surface, lapping its banks under the drooping wild flowers and grasses that flash like steel above the water. No pipes of Pan disturb the country folk to-day—yet somewhere in the fields a homely voice singing a homely song gives the old idyllic note to this Leicestershire pastoral.

The track leading from the bridge comes out in the village of Thorpe Langton. Its stone church, dedicated to St. Leonard, is the smaller of the two churches traditionally associated with the Bishop of Lichfield. The church is in the Early English style, dating from about 1240, and has a western tower with pinnacles and a small spire, containing three bells. Hill writes of it: "The edifice is an excellent specimen of a decorated church, and the best small church in the neighbourhood. The walls are very rich with the lichens

THE FLOCK.

of five centuries, and the masonry is of the most excellent kind." The village is on the Welham road, a little over a mile from where the Stonton Brook runs into the Welland, having come all the way from Skeffington through one of the most beautiful valleys of High Leicestershire. The village is the smallest of the Langtons. Its little inn on the Welham road is close to the turning, past the church, that leads into Great Bowden, two miles away. This by-road crosses the Saddington Brook, which flows from Saddington, past Smeeton Westerby, to the Welland.

Continuing along the Welham road in the direction of Kibworth for about three-quarters of a mile, we come to East Langton. A turning to the left leads

into the village, where there is a small chapel without a spire or tower, the mother church of the Langtons being just across the Welham road, less than half a mile away. Directories are very confusing in the naming of these villages. Thus White has " Langton (East) or Church Langton," and Kelly's modern directory calls the village we are now considering " Langton (or Church Langton) " and the central village with the large church " East Langton." Nichols, however, describes the latter as " Church Langton, a rectory, including the chapelries of Thorpe Langton and Tur Langton, and the hamlets of East

A DISTANT VIEW OF THORPE LANGTON.

Langton and West Langton." The reason for the confusion is that at a later date the parish was divided into four townships : East and West Langton, Thorpe and Tur Langton. The Ordnance Map gives the names of the five villages as they are described by Nichols, and as they are always known.

Church Langton is at almost the highest point of the " gentle eminence " round the Caudle (with the valley of the brook between) on which all the Langtons stand. The ridge attains a height of four hundred and twenty feet at Tur Langton, and four hundred and ten feet at Church Langton, actually a little higher than the Caudle itself, though owing to the very gradual slope of the ground this is not apparent. The main part of the village, with the church and Rectory, stands back from the Tilton road, where two by-roads join and

run into it, forming an open space immediately in front of the Rectory. This Georgian House is probably the most beautiful building of its kind, the red brick frontage being adorned with stone vases at the corners of a pediment, on which are white Adams designs in plaster. There is also a stone balustrade above the arched brick-work entrance. The interior is adorned throughout with very fine examples of Adam workmanship. The church is behind the Rectory, beyond the old-fashioned garden enclosed by trees and lilac bushes. The embattled tower, containing eight bells, is visible through the trees, its height and massive proportions being better appreciated after leaving the Rectory garden.

The interior of the church has the dignity of a cathedral. Near the door leading from the chancel to the vestry is a memorial bas-relief to the Rev. William Hanbury, who bought the advowson in 1753, and whose descendants were rectors of Church Langton until 1899: the head of the musician and arboriculturist is sculptured in marble with a musical score and a book of gardening beside him. To the labours of William Hanbury as a nursery gardener—he carried out an extensive scheme of plantations at Langton and Gumley—is due the foundation of the Hanbury Trust, out of which, among other additions to the Langtons, the church at Tur Langton was built, and in 1924 the Hanbury Institute at Church Langton, comprising a concert hall and library, a room for handicraft and cookery, and a caretaker's cottage. William Hanbury's enthusiasm as a musician conferred a signal distinction on the church. The first performance in a parish church in England of Handel's "Messiah" was given at Church Langton on September 27th, 1759.* The organ now in the church was built for this performance by Abraham Adcock, and has the curious distinction of having black naturals and white sharps. Mr. Hanbury wrote a long account of the performance, the object of which was to raise money for his charities, in his "History of the Charitable Foundations at Church Langton." This volume is as graphic as it is discursive, and as witty as it is occasionally bitter. Hanbury was as good an enemy as he was a musician and gardener, and those who opposed his schemes come off badly in his book. Very early in his arboricultural experiments he began a feud with Mrs. Pickering and Mrs. Byrd, two wealthy ladies who lived at West Langton Hall, because they would not consent to his enclosing some of the common land of the parish for his plantations, although other parishioners agreed. Thwarted ambition on one side and jealousy on the other disturbed the peace of Church Langton. Hanbury preached a sermon on the text, "And he was beset by two she-bears,"

* "The Messiah" was first performed at Cambridge in May, 1759, and at Oxford in 1762.

and removed his plantations to Gumley, while Mrs. Pickering and Mrs. Byrd went abroad, taking " a long flight to gather strength." These events marked different stages of the feud, which lasted many years. Hostility to the grandiose schemes of William Hanbury was inevitable, and although there were many in the country against him, there were many who gave him their ardent support. Among the latter were Hugo Meynell and Mr. Mundy, a landowner who planted Mundy's Gorse in Quorn country. The views of Hanbury's opponents are given by Throsby, but neither side of the controversy need be entered into

CHURCH LANGTON.

here ; it is all forgotten to-day, and one event alone stands out—the performance of " The Messiah."

Strange rumours heralded this performance : " one party affirmed it was a scheme to raise the militia ; another that the Day of Judgment was to be acted, and that there was to be heaven and hell. The organ-pipes were really taken for fire-arms, and reports prevailed that there were great guns and little guns to the amount of several hundreds." Two performances were announced, the first for the 26th September, the day before the performance of " The Messiah," when Handel's *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* were to be given, with other anthems. All the inns and cottages in the district that could provide

accommodation, besides the inns at Harborough, were full several days before the 26th; " prices of butter, fowls, etc., were tripled "; and many noblemen, including the Duke of Devonshire, " were glad to accept lodgings at glazier's and such mean artificers." There was a great concourse at Church Langton for a rehearsal on the 25th. Of the first day's performance Hanbury writes:

" Early in the morning swarms of foot-men, horses, coaches and chaises came flocking in from every point. Neither was the chain transitory, since a person upon any eminence might see others appear to keep up the thread winding off; for as fast as a group or a greater body in this chain advanced, fresh groups at the furthest extent of view would successively show their heads. Noises from every part were heard, but particularly the great turnpike road rattled with the sound of chariots and horses."

There were many picturesque accompaniments to the procession, which formed up in the village street. The workmen from the plantations wore a livery which included white stockings and breeches, and " stout men " were appointed with staves to keep order. The Rector, preceded by two vergers with white wands, led the procession to the church. " Instead of the Voluntary, the overture in the *Occasional Oratorio* was struck off by all the instruments the moment we entered the church; and as few there had ever heard anything of that kind by such a band, most of them were struck into seemingly statues. Some of the common people indeed were frighted, and hurried out of the church with all speed; for hearing the kettle-drums, which they took to be thunder, and the trumpets sounding in the midst of such an heavenly noise of instruments, they thought of what had been reported, that The Day of Judgment was really come indeed."

Meanwhile at West Langton Hall, Hugo Meynell's household was preparing the " cold collation " for the following day: one hundred and four dishes " dressed by Mr. Meynell's cook, and which were so disfigured by the foreign methods of practise, that few of them were known, except venizon-pasties and such like: among them were a dozen ham-pies of more than a yard in diameter." The cold collation was served in a capacious booth where the company assembled after the performance of " The Messiah." While the orchestra was tuning up, and the stringed instruments, the trumpets and the drums were echoing through the church, so great a crowd had collected that the church doors had to be closed, many hundreds outside being unable to hear the whole oratorio, though several numbers were repeated afterwards. Among those who arrived too late, was a " young lady, coming singly on horseback, with one servant only, [who] offered twenty guineas to any person or persons who could

procure her admittance," but no room could be found for her. "Who this lady was," says Hanbury, "I could never learn." A paragraph describing the performance must be given in his own words :

"The music on so solemn a subject, by so good a band, was most affecting ; and to see the effect it had on different persons was astonishingly moving and strange. An eye without tears I believe could hardly be found in the whole church, and everyone endeavoured to conceal the emotions of his own heart : drooping heads, to render the tears unnoticed, became for a while almost general, till by now and then looking about, and finding others affected in like manner, no concealment in a little time was made. Tears then with unconcern were seen trickling down the faces of many : and then indeed, it was extremely moving to see the pity, compassion, and devotion, that had possessed the greatest part present."

As the light falls from the Hanbury memorial window, diffused over the quiet aisles of the church, there seems to come an echo of the drums and trumpets ; yet once beyond their spell, the massive tower pointing to the sky tells of an older day. The impression left on the mind is not of the ambitions of William Hanbury, but of dark, far-off events, intrigue and strife and the passing of Kings, vague and shadowy as the time-worn stone in Lichfield Cathedral carved in the likeness of Walter de Langton.

The last of the Langton villages is Tur Langton on the road to Kibworth. It is a large modern village, and the red brick church is not a landmark for which the county can be particularly grateful to the Hanbury Trust ; its style is out of harmony with the stone churches of Leicestershire. Most of the land in the district is owned by Mr. W. T. Hayr, a prominent follower of the Hunt and a breeder of Shire horses, whose farm is in the village. Tur Langton looks down over the low country towards Harborough. A mile south of it on the Welham road is West Langton Hall, close by the Langton Hall Spinneys. This historic Hall has had a long connection with hunting history since the days of Meynell. Its present owner, Mr. Harry Mills, is one of the pillars of the Fernie Hunt, and his father acted as deputy Master for Mr. Fernie in the Monday country. The Hall is a stone mansion in a small well-wooded park. South of it is the railway and the Saddington Brook, with the Brook Spinney close to the Harborough turnpike, the last covert of the Thursday country. It generally holds a fox, but is difficult to get away from on account of the railway, and hounds have had several narrow escapes when a fox has crossed the line.

Having arrived at the turnpike, we are soon in Harborough, whence we may start upon our exploration of the third and last of the Fernie countries.

CHAPTER X

FRIDAY—SATURDAY COUNTRY

"Ye that frequent the hills,
And highest holtes of all."

OLD SONG.

LEAVING Market Harborough by the road to Great Bowden (to which we shall return) and taking one of the pleasant by-roads out of this village leading to Welham, we cross the Saddington Brook after about a mile, just before reaching the railway. About three-quarters of a mile further, the road crosses the Stonton Brook close to its junction with the Welland, and half a mile from Welham village. Welham originally consisted of two distinct Manors, Waleham and Walendeham, mentioned in Domesday. The substantial old church, in the Decorated style, is close to a stone bridge over the Welland. The river here describes a loop round Weston-by-Welland, a mile away in Northamptonshire, and continues as the county boundary to within half a mile of Rockingham.

After crossing the Welland into Northamptonshire, and also the railway where the London and North Western main line to Stamford leaves its joint line with the Great Northern to Melton and Grantham,* Weston-by-Welland is passed and the road turns to the left just short of Ashley. The object of this detour is to approach Medbourne by the road from Ashley and to recross the river through some typical and very beautiful Welland Valley scenery. The river twists and turns every few hundred yards on its course through the water meadows. By the bridge on the Medbourne road its banks are lined with willows. These are not small pollard willows, but trees lopped years ago, and now spreading out with a fresh growth of branches, the boles twisted and gnarled, with deep fissures running up their whole length under the spray of leaves that dapple the backs of cattle standing beneath them in the sun. Beyond the trees the river widens where the banks are poached and trodden down. On a hot day the bullocks grazed on this rich pasture—black Welsh

* Railways are given as marked on the present Ordnance Map (before the amalgamation of some of the main lines) to avoid confusion in map-reading.

runts with long horns, Herefords, and shorthorn crossbreds—can be seen standing in the water. They stand with their flanks lapped by the stream, their horns white in the sun, or move restlessly along the banks flicking their sides and pawing the dry earth where the grass is worn away. Tall reeds in places form a barrier across the water, and scattered thorn trees lean over the

THE BANKS OF THE WELLAND.

banks. In the distance the Welham Flats extend towards Rockingham and the blue line of hills. The country continues level for about a mile until the road turns to the left into the village of Medbourne, which lies in the valley of the last stream in the Fernie country, the Medbourne Brook. This brook has its source on the high ground above Hallaton and Horninghold, near Fearn Farm, and is fed by three tributaries, the Hallaton and Horninghold Brooks, and a little stream which rises close to the old encampment by

Cranoe Lodge. North-west of Medbourne is Slawston Hill, and east of it the high ground on which stands Nevill Holt. Medbourne is situated in a triangle formed by the two railways already mentioned and a loop line from Hallaton to Medbourne which joins the main line to Stamford. This line is now disused and a number of trucks have been left upon it close to the bridge over the brook a mile north of the village. These trucks are covered with rust and have been there for the last few years.

The houses of Medbourne are grouped round the stream and up the gradual slope east of it, the square-towered church standing close to the water opposite the fifteenth-century pack-horse bridge, the old stone arches of which are surmounted by white wooden rails and a brick-paved footway. Beyond the bridge the village street crosses the stream by a ford. The old bridge probably marks the course of the Gartree Road, although the only part of the road that can be traced near Medbourne is a short section beyond the railway, south of Slawston. The Gartree road probably led to the Roman villa, of which the remains of a fine tessellated pavement were found in 1721. The fragments were twice exposed and re-covered, but they were removed in 1871, when, the offer of them to the South Kensington Museum having been refused, they remained for some years in an office in London and were finally destroyed.

An interesting story concerns the Nevill Arms Inn at Medbourne: the old building was burnt down about seventy years ago as the result of a foolish attempt to make money. A blacksmith hired the dance room on the first floor of the inn for the performance of an extraordinary feat, charging sixpence a head from his audience. He lay on his back, had an anvil placed on his chest and a blower kept the sparks flying while a shoe was forged on the anvil. The inn was set on fire and completely gutted. This story was related by an old inhabitant of Medbourne.

The history of a very remarkable series of fires which threatened the destruction of the whole village has been recorded from evidence carefully collected by the Rev. T. K. Bonney Nevinson, Rector of Medbourne. His account is as follows:

"Three years running (1855–57) incendiary fires occurred in the village. The first took place at Medbourne Grange: three or four stacks were burned, the property of Mrs. Hickman (widow), who then occupied the Grange. The second burnt some stacks and buildings at Barn Close, owned by Mr. Thomas Hexton, who lived in the house in Kennel Lane, now (1926) occupied by Mr. A. Thatcher, ex-huntsman. Traces of the fire are still to be seen on the

stones of some of the buildings. The third and worst fire happened just before Christmas 1857; it started in the farm-yard of Mr. William Letts. A south-westerly gale blew sparks across the brook and set fire to Pateman's bakehouse, which was on the site of Mr. P. J. Tobitt's present house: it destroyed also William Plowright's grocer's shop, besides three cottages and a barn. A fire-engine was brought to play on the flames, but the mob cut the hose. Thomas Payne, son of Joseph Payne, Parish Clerk, who worked

NEAR MEDBOURNE.

for William Letts, was suspected, being the last man seen to leave the farm. He was pronounced guilty and sentenced to penal servitude for four years. Mrs. William Letts consulted a 'wise woman' (mesmerist) at Leicester. She in a trance said, 'Tom Payne didn't do it.' At least twenty years later a man named Foster, who had been a policeman in Medbourne, confessed on his death-bed that he had a grudge against William Letts, and started at any rate the third fire. An amusing fact was communicated by Mr. Alfred Collins, ex-shoemaker, of Medbourne: his father on the night of the fire saw Tom

Payne (who was 'a wee bit saft') in his shirt-sleeves sheltering under a wall from the rain. Mr. Collins kindly gave Tom his coat; in that coat he was arrested, and so, as Alfred Collins said, 'My father's coat went to Leicester Gaol.'"

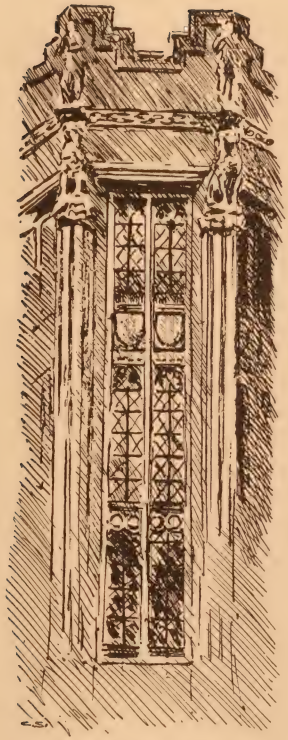
Arthur Thatcher's house, mentioned in the story, is opposite the kennels built by Sir Bache Cunard in 1878. The Fernie hounds were kennelled at Medbourne until May 1924, when they were moved to Lord Stalbridge's new kennels at Great Bowden. The old kennels are very pleasing in appearance and their situation has an old-world charm about it that would be hard to find elsewhere so close to two main-line railways. But in spite of these, Medbourne is off the beaten track; for the road from Market Harborough to Oundle and Peterborough, the nearest thoroughfare of any importance, is more than three miles away. Kennel Lane leads up a steep hill to Nevill Holt, where we are back in the high country, with Medbourne and the Welham Flats spread like a map below. After passing through the iron entrance gates of the estate, a long avenue of chestnut trees joins the road from Drayton to Stockerston, which runs by Nevill Holt and continues towards the Stockerston crossroads through an avenue of young limes. Watson's Gorse (sometimes called Drayton Gorse) is on the hill south of Nevill Holt, above the village of Drayton and the railway. This covert is generally the first draw after a meet at Medbourne. The hillside is very steep, and there is some rough wooded ground beyond the covert itself. On the Medbourne side there is a fine view over the Friday–Saturday country. When hounds break away in the direction of Nevill Holt the hilly going takes it out of the horses if, as often happens, the fox runs a ring round the outskirts of Nevill Holt, circling back to the woods south-west of the Hall. Just beyond the chestnut avenue there is one of the very few walls in the Fernie country, an unfamiliar obstacle to horses accustomed to the thorn fences. The renovation of Watson's Gorse has already been described; besides the gorse on the hill there is a wooded portion of the covert on the slope above Medbourne.

Nevill Holt, once the home of the Nevills and later of the Cunards, is now a Preparatory School in connection with Uppingham. The church close to the Hall was originally Norman, but was largely rebuilt in the thirteenth century. It contains the Nevill Chapel with the family monuments, and a chapel by the east window in memory of Edward Cunard, besides a brass to the mother of Sir Bache Cunard, the former Master of the Hunt. The plateau on which the Hall stands commands a wide view of the Welland Valley, and beyond it, East Carlton and Rockingham. The most interesting architectural

feature of Nevill Holt is the Thomas Palmer window on the east side of the Hall.

In 1444, Thomas Palmer, a son of William Palmer of Carlton, acquired all the lands comprising the Manor of Holt-juxta-Medbourne, part of which had been in the Palmer family since 1418. A few years later Thomas Palmer obtained leave from the Crown to impark three hundred acres, and to have free warren at Holt, where he wished to reside, and in all his lands in Leicestershire, including Medbourne. He was a man of large means, and therefore, when he built himself a mansion at Holt, he designed one worthy of his position. Now, the bay window, the entrance porch and the hall are practically all that remains of the original house. The window is a fine example of fifteenth century domestic Gothic, and time has done little to mar the beauty of its carvings. It is composed of four tiers, only two of which light the oriel in the hall (often so called, though it is not really an oriel window); the third tier, ornamented with two shields, corresponds with the space inside the oriel occupied by the groined roof. Some years ago the fact that there were four tiers in the window, and that the fourth tier could not be accounted for, aroused the curiosity of the owner of Nevill Holt at the time. The anomaly was afterwards explained by the discovery of a stone staircase, which had been walled in, leading up from what is now known as the Adams Dormitory to a small panelled room, lighted by the mysterious fourth tier. In this room was found the fully clothed body of a woman. The remains afforded no clue to the period in which the woman lived, nor is anything known of the circumstances in which she met her death. The little room is now used as a bathroom, and the old stone staircase can still be seen.

The Hall has undergone many changes since Thomas Palmer's death in 1476, when parts of it were presumably left incomplete. The estate passed to the Nevills through the marriage of his daughter with William Nevill, whose grandson, Sir Thomas Nevill, is alluded to by Leland as "Neville of the Holt." A later Sir Thomas Nevill, who was connected with the family by marriage and assumed the name, having been originally a Smyth, is responsible for many additions made to the house early in the seventeenth century. After the Civil War it was again added to, and largely rebuilt. The influence of the Adams can be seen in the interior renovations made at the end of the eighteenth century, when the estate had passed to the descendants of a Polish count, who had married one of the Nevills, his family later adopting the old name. Finally, Sir Bache Cunard carried out extensive alterations in more recent years. A



THE THOMAS PALMER WINDOW.

notable feature of Nevill Holt is the stabling, a well-designed Georgian building, close to the Hall.

The Nevill Holt coverts extend down the hillside towards the village of Great Easton. First on the right is Holt Wood, and separated from it by a ride, the new planting known as Spa Wood, planted in Sir Bache Cunard's time. In this wood was the once famous Holt Spa, containing two springs different in character. The springs were discovered in 1728, and the spa was a celebrated watering-place in the eighteenth century. All that can be seen now is the stone-work covering the springs in the middle of the wood, a triangular stone above the low entrance bearing the date 1779. The entrance has been wired up to prevent boys from the school from going into the rather dangerous interior, the roof of which is crumbling away; it is, however, possible to get past the wire netting, and the springs can be seen dripping very slowly into a sort of trough. The flow is said to amount to a hogshead in twenty-four hours. West of Holt Wood and Spa Wood, across the fields sloping down to the Rockingham and Uppingham road, is America Wood, and beyond it another plantation called New York.

Returning to the Stockerston road, on the left above Blaston is Cocked Hat Spinney, with Skevington Gorse—a small covert of three acres, but one of the best in the third Fernie country—below it nearer Blaston. Blaston * village lies in the hollow known as the Blaston valley, leading down to the Medbourne Brook. In the village is Stone House, where Mrs. Fernie has lived since Keythorpe Hall was sold, a few years ago. There are many small spinneys and coverts near the village. Blaston Hollow near Blaston Pasture is a narrow strip of covert containing old sand-pits with steep banks, where there are fox earths, and Overclose Spinney, west of Blaston Lodge, generally holds a litter of cubs. Sturrard's Spinney, near by, has a lane running through it and is therefore of little use. Immediately on the left of the road to Stockerston is the New Planting—a compact covert chiefly of ash, divided in half by a ride—looking down on Blaston; and on the ridge beyond it is Hoeback Spinney.

We now reach the Stockerston Cross-roads, the junction of four roads, to Blaston, Horninghold, Stockerston and Great Easton. The hillside slopes down by the Stockerston Woods and Merivale Holt to the valley of the Eye, the brook being the boundary between the Fernie and the Cottesmore. Taking the right-hand side of the road first, Merivale Little Wood borders the road, Merivale Holt being in the valley a field away, with Holyoak Wood adjoining

* The name is pronounced Blāston (the first syllable rhyming with "Place").

A WALL NEAR NEVILL HOLT

it. Beyond the Eye Brook on the opposite hillside is the village of Stoke Dry, its little church clearly seen on the hill. On the left of the road, almost opposite Merivale Little Wood, are two ancient stone gateposts leading into the Hall Field, across the slopes of which is a distant view, framed by the old gateway, of Stockerston Hall. There is little doubt that this gateway was once the entrance to the old Hall, although it may have had some connection with Mirabel Hermitage, the patronage of which belonged to the Lordship of Stockerston. The name has survived in the old names of the coverts, Mirable Little Wood and Mirable Big Wood (or Mirable Hole). The woods are marked on the estate map to-day as Little Merrible Wood and Great Merrible Wood. Hole has now changed to Holt,* and Merivale Holt is the popular name of the larger covert. Part of the covert has been cut down, and young growth of ash and elder is springing up, with some scrub oak. Merivale Holt is a good covert, but a fox generally makes for the big woodlands.

The little Holyoaks Wood, separated from the Holt by a small stream, is not called after a former Master of the Quorn, as its name suggests. Holy Oaks (also spelt Haliok and Halwic) was a township in the time of Edward I, near to Leighfield Forest, which was planted by order of the King. The name survives in its older form in the Liberty of Holy Oakes, transferred to the Parish of Stockerston in 1885.

Like Owston Wood, the Stockerston Woods were probably part of Leighfield Forest. A large part of Leicestershire and Rutland was forest before the time of Edward I, early perambulations giving boundaries which extend from Twyford to the Welland; but according to Bridges, "The greatest portion of that part of Leicestershire which adjoins the County of Rutland was made a forest by King Edward I, who coming into the North parts through a wood in this county called Resburn Chace, the same that is now called Reresby, saw there five does, whereupon he presently commanded a servant of his, called Richard, to stay in those parts till his return out of the North, and look after these deer to the King's use." The boundaries of Leighfield Forest were less extensive according to a summary taken from a perambulation in 1299: "Beginning at Fletterish corner in the field at Oakham, it goes westward, taking in all Braunston high meadow, the Wisp and Withcot-sale: and so proceeds, taking in Bittlewell-sale and Cockley-sale, and so to Steer Wood: and then taking in Tinford Bridge, it takes in Belton and Wardley towns, proceeds to Beaumont-sale and Preston Underwood, up to Liddington,

* Holt means a plantation, shrubbery, or small wood; it also signifies a high hill (see old song at head of this chapter).

taking in all Uppingham Brand and the East Field : and so, taking in all Ayston common fields it proceeds by Ridlington to Brook, and then up to Brook-mill : and so to Fletterish." Whatever may have been the actual extent of Leighfield Forest, however, the big woods of the Cottesmore were unquestionably part of it, and so, probably, were the Fernie woods round Stockerston, and Allexton Wood.

As the road descends to the Eye valley past Merivale Holt, with the Stockerston woods on the left, Wardley Wood and Beaumont Chase come into view beyond the brook, climbing the high ground towards Uppingham. At the foot of the hill the course of the Eye can be followed winding its way through the meadows towards the Welland, in places concealed by trees, or crossing the more open country by the field-road to Stoke Dry, with only a few willows along its banks. The road turns to the left into the village of Stockerston, and a narrow lane leads through the village up to the Hall and Bolt Wood, which is on the hillside beyond the Hall Field. Crowning the hill are the two symmetrical plantations known as the Bon Hills Spinneys.

The Early English church of St. Peter at Stockerston contains fragments of ancient stained glass in all the windows of the north aisle, the colours of the old designs lighting it with a quiet faded beauty. There are two very old recumbent effigies in stone—one in chain armour with a shield and dog at the feet—and two brasses, originally on the floor of the south chapel, now fitted in the north wall. On the two brasses are figures of knights in armour with their wives, but they are much worn and the outline of the figures has in places disappeared. There is a stone in the floor to Sir Thomas Burton, baronet, of Stockerston, a celebrated Cavalier who died in 1669. The old Hall of Stockerston no longer exists, and the whereabouts of its site is doubtful, though the remains of a pebble-covered drive discovered in the low ground near the village may indicate its position. It seems more reasonable, however, to suppose that the stone gateway near Merivale Holt belonged to the Hall. The present Hall, owned by Miss Turner, is a Georgian building close to the church, its mellow red-brick walls making a pleasant contrast with the green trees round it. The Hall Field extends to the Stockerston road and is bounded on the west by Bolt Wood.

Bolt Wood is really Stockerston Wood. The large wood north of it, which has always been referred to in hunting literature as Stockerston Wood, does not belong to the estate ; its correct name is Park Wood. As Stockerston Wood, however, it will always be known to hunting people. Bolt Wood is chiefly composed of oak, with some pines. The Bon Hills Spinneys at the

eastern end of Bolt Wood are two rounded clumps of tall trees, with a grass ride between them, very conspicuously placed on the hill. Park Wood, which consists mainly of ash trees, is on the next slope, north-west of the Hall, sweeping up over the crest of the high ground towards Allexton. The highest point of the Stockerston estate, immediately above Horninghold, is five hundred and twelve feet, at the Bon Hills. After we have left Stockerston

THE OLD GATEWAY NEAR STOCKERSTON HALL.

and returned to the cross-roads, several small spinneys can be identified from the road to Horninghold. On the left is the Blaston valley, seen lengthways, with Slawston Wood and the windmill in the distance. The road passes close by the Bon Hills Spinneys, on the right, and just below them, looking towards the Hegg Fields, is the Breach Spinney, or Horninghold Wood as it is sometimes called. Beyond it, just visible in the valley east of Horninghold, is the famous Hegg Spinney, the starting-place of the Horninghold run. Hoeback Spinney is now viewed from another direction, close at hand on the

left of the road. All these spinneys, including Muckleborough Spinney, a small plantation near the higher end of Stockerston or Park Wood, belonged to the late Mr. Alexander Cross of Horninghold and are now owned by his brother, Mr. Tom Cross. The road descends into the valley to the fine old village, which is sheltered by elms and chestnuts. Horninghold is the only place-name in the Fernie country with the affix " wold," so familiar in Quorn country. The name was formerly written Horning-wold, and the village was so called from the hilly country that surrounds it and extends up to Allexton on the Fernie boundary, close to where the Uppingham turnpike crosses the Eye at Finchley Bridge. The ground drops steeply into Horninghold from a height of five hundred feet (the level of the village itself is over three hundred), and rises again to nearly five hundred and fifty at Lodge Farm, just over a mile away on the field-road to Allexton.

The little church of Horninghold, with its broach spire, has an interesting south doorway of Norman workmanship, with two figures carved in relief on the stones which form the capitals supporting the arch. The church is screened on one side by a high wall, and the other abuts on a cottage, so that it is difficult to get a clear view of it, the small spire alone rising clear of the trees and buildings. The little stream known as the Horninghold Brook, coming from the direction of Muckleborough Lodge, flows north of the village, a grass track crossing it to join the Allexton road. Before taking this track we turn aside into the fields west of Mr. Cross's house.

These fields are called the West Hegg, Middle Hegg, and East Hegg, and are bounded on the north side by the covert that takes its name from them, and by an adjoining covert known as Frisby's Planting. Both are long narrow spinneys—the length of the Hegg Spinney is about a quarter of a mile—and both are formed of small trees growing along the banks of the stream. It will be remembered that the fox started on the great run of 1911 in the direction of Stockerston Wood, which is less than a mile away on the opposite hill, but turned to the left before reaching it, towards the Eye. Beyond these two coverts is a very small triangular plantation known as Dick Hill's Spinney. Three fields north of this is Allexton Wood.

The best way to view the country round Allexton Wood is to return over the Hegg Fields and take the track already mentioned, which joins the Allexton road opposite to Fearn Farm, less than a quarter of a mile beyond the road. This farm is often mentioned by Tailby ; it is now called Hallaton Fearn Farm because it belongs to the Hallaton Charities. The road, which leads up from Hallaton to Allexton, is like one of the by-roads over the Wiltshire downs,

LAUNDE WOODS AND ROBIN-A-TIPTOE

partly grass-grown and showing little sign of use. It traverses a plateau that seems, though it is not actually, to be raised above all High Leicestershire. This plateau is a little more than two hundred feet lower than Whadborough Hill, the highest point of the northern watershed, which is seven hundred and fifty-five feet; but, when looking north from the road, the high country of the Cottesmore recedes with all its varied skyline and infinitely varied contours of hill and vale and wood, as though viewed from a great height. Robin-a-Tiptoe and Halstead have the boldest silhouettes. The skyline appears a dark smoky blue under one of those typical November skies towards late afternoon, when the clouds that hang over the heights are flushed with saffron, changing to a rosy glimmer far off on the western edge of the hills. Launde Big Wood overshadows the site of the old Priory; Loddington lies in the valley, and the white road from the village can be followed as it crosses the Eye and ascends to East Norton. The very spirit of hunting seems to be reflected in this November sky and landscape. A few leaves chase each other across the road, whirled away from the scrub oaks at the edge of Allexton Wood; tussocks of grass and the tall dry stems of the hemlocks shine suddenly as the sun breaks through the clouds and the rosy glimmer turns to a vivid light; long blue shadows dart forward from every bush and tree. The rusty brown and bronze crest of the wood appears to flame along its whole length, contrasting with a deep blue tone half-way up the trees, where the shadow of the hill is cast upon them by the setting sun. Allexton Wood lies on the eastern slope and only the tops of the trees catch this last light. Such are the moments when any day's hunting seems to have been worth while; tedious delays and disappointments are atoned for by the freshness of the air, the scent of the dead November leaves and the grass, and the glamour over everything; the distances all promise great runs in the future, or tell of many in the past. The setting is the thing at this hour, the landscape dominates the minds of all who go hunting with an eye for nature.

Let us take farewell of the Harborough country while riding home on such an evening, attuned by the richness of everything—the sumptuous and resplendent colours of the sky, the sombre and restrained tones of the landscape—to a mood which is neither gay nor melancholy, but finds its counterpart in the scarlet coat of the friend beside us, which is no longer a vivid contrast to the green fields, for both are harmonised by the pervading bronze and gold; or in the habit of the lady who rides with him, no longer black, but dusted over with the metallic sheen of old lacquer; or in the faces of both, like ivory inlaid upon a setting of field and hedgerow and the arabesques of branches from

which a few leaves still fall. It was thus that Whyte Melville saw his Mr. Sawyer and Miss Merlin when they exchanged their light confidences in a spirit of happy comradeship after the sterner work of the day was done. Who cannot rise to thoughts above the prosaic before those clouds that drift over the last coverts of this great country? They darken the hills as with a pall, but are gradually broken up into every imaginable shape of windy hollow and mountain crest, shafts of light breaking through them to reach the most distant of their airy summits. High overhead the open spaces of the sky, like inland seas, are flecked with innumerable wavelets and wreaths of foam that melt away into the dim cool depths of blue, a purple-blue already overcast with the shade of night. Below, on the eastern horizon are the pines and oaks of the woods round Keythorpe Hall. Ram's Head and Vowe's Gorse stand out darkly west of Keythorpe itself; Moor Hill comes into view south of the Hall, as we follow the bridle-track that turns off from the road on the Allexton plateau, and leads down to the source of the Medbourne Brook to join the road to Hallaton—old names, and old woods that have seen the early days of hunting in Leicestershire. Vowe's Gorse was made for Osbaldeston, although the man who planted it has only been recorded as " a great admirer " of the old Squire. The Hallaton road from East Norton passes Moor Hill, after it has joined the lower road running from Goadby past Keythorpe Hall. The bridle track has crossed a wide undulating upland between Allexton and Keythorpe, where as the evening deepens the bleating of sheep can be heard by the small stream that becomes the Medbourne Brook. The gate by the farm-house west of Moor Hill leads to the last mile of the road into Hallaton. Just beyond Moor Hill are the Hallaton Spinneys, and a mile away near Goadby, Hallaton Wood. Like the plantations of Noseley, many of the smallest plantations round Keythorpe are of more recent date than the famous Keythorpe coverts. After we have crossed a few fields east of the road we come to the Hallaton Brook, and Hallaton Wood can be seen, nearly a mile away, catching the red flush of the afterglow. Before it is dusk we enter Hallaton.

The stream, flowing down from the Hallaton Spinneys, close to the spinneys of Moor Hill, crosses the road in Hallaton and joins the Medbourne Brook near the railway about a mile away. Reference has been made in an earlier chapter to the annual custom known as the Bottle Kicking that takes place on Easter Monday—a rough sport which in its original form was rather like the Cornish sport of hurling. It is now an old custom revived every year, but the rougher and more picturesque side of it has disappeared. Nobody knows when it was started—it dates back at least five hundred years. It is

connected with the many hare customs of Leicestershire,* the origin and meaning of the word in this sense being obscure. Before the enclosure of the Hallaton common fields in 1770, the land where the bottle-kicking took place was called Hare Crop Leys, the Rector of Hallaton receiving all rents and profits from this land on condition that he provided two hare-pies, two dozen penny loaves and a quantity of ale, to be scrambled for on Easter Monday after a service at the church. When the enclosure took place he received other land in lieu of the original leys. But a hill above the town known as Hare Pie Bank is still the scene of the contest. The Easter Monday service over (the lunch which followed it is no longer given), a procession is formed and marches to the Rectory, where the two large hare-pies are broken up and, with the loaves, are put into sacks. Two wooden kegs or bottles are filled with ale. The procession then goes to the hill, where the young men of Hallaton and the young men of Medbourne have assembled to wrestle for the bottles. On the way to the hill the bread is distributed and scrambled for. On the hill the fragments of pie and the two bottles of ale are put into a circular hole, and then the real scramble begins. The crowds pelt each other with the pie, which is soon scattered all over the field. The bottles of ale are struggled for in the manner of the Cornish hurling, the combatants wrestling in the fields or in the streams, the object of each side being to convey the bottles into their own territory, marked by the Medbourne and Hallaton Brooks. In its old form the sport was rough and many of the combatants were much damaged before the day was decided; the victory is said generally to have been gained by the men of Hallaton, and the struggle to have ended in the Hallaton Brook. The evening is spent in festivities in the neighbourhood.

Seen in the twilight the fine old village, with its main street descending the gradual slope of the hill towards Slawston, recalls many great meets of hounds in the Friday–Saturday country. For almost two centuries Hallaton has been a regular Fernie fixture, a Billesdon fixture, or a meet of the Quorn. The church of St. Michael, which is close to the brook, is partly Norman, with an Early English tower and spire, and later fourteenth century additions, when the Early English was just passing into the Decorated. On a stone which was formerly part of the Norman doorway of the early church, now built into the wall of the north porch, there is a low-relief and roughly executed piece of sculpture depicting St. Michael and the Dragon. For nearly a thousand years these crude figures have looked down on this little corner of

* *See* Skillington's "A History of Leicester," page 13.

Leicestershire ; St. Michael with raised spear and shield, the Dragon struggling at his feet.

Slawston Covert is on the road home to Market Harborough. Above the village of Slawston the white windmill, which has been so often mentioned as a landmark in the country, looks pale and ghostly on the green hillside,

SLAWSTON WINDMILL.

backed by the dark trees of Slawston Covert. The wood slopes down the hillside towards the railway west of Medbourne, a branch road leading past it into the village.

The wind soughs through the trees—a cold November wind—and the dry rustling of the last leaves of the oaks makes a low murmur, a crisp sibilant note, which is lost in the thunder of a passing train, as the wood and the mill fade into darkness.

CHAPTER XI

GREAT BOWDEN

Rex tenet Bugedone. Rex Edwardus tenuit.

DOMESDAY BOOK.

IN the history of hunting, the Sport of Kings, the name of Great Bowden most happily links up the present with the past. The head of a Royal Manor in the time of Edward the Confessor, Bugedone was retained as a Royal possession by William the Conqueror.

As the centuries passed away, and the borders of Rockingham and Arden Forests receded further from the banks of the Welland, the old hunting lodges no longer saw the Royal huntsmen bring back the trophies of the chase to their castle walls. But with the partial or complete disappearance of the great forests and the wild life they sheltered—deer, wolves, boars, wild cats, and even wild cattle, besides hares and foxes—there arose the modern sport of fox-hunting. Great Bowden has the distinction of being the first name associated with fox-hunting in Leicestershire, Hugo Meynell's hounds having been first kenneled at Bowden Inn. Up to Meynell's time, or a little earlier, much of the wild life of the great forests still remained. Morton, writing early in the eighteenth century, describes a herd of semi-wild hogs—the descendants of a badger-coloured Italian boar and a black Westphalian sow—which were all of a fox-colour, were very fierce, and disowned the "government of man." These animals lived in the woods near Burleigh, the Earl of Exeter's estate in Northamptonshire, and one of them, which was killed by his hunstman, weighed twenty-six stone. The wild cat had disappeared before Morton's day. He refers, however, to cattle which were "as wild as any of the deer tribe," and instances the finding of three heifers in a wood after it had been cut down. According to his description of them, these animals were of the same type as the famous park cattle, such as the Chillingham and Chartley herds—survivors of an early domesticated breed which may possibly have been descended from the great Urus that once roamed the British forests.

As we have seen, the popularity of fox-hunting increased rapidly after

Meynell came to Leicestershire, but for a time Great Bowden and Harborough gave way to the new hunting centres, Quorndon and Melton. Harborough soon rose to fame, and at last Great Bowden has regained its place in hunting history. Bowden Inn, where the Quorn hounds were kenneled while Meynell lived at West Langton Hall, and for a part of the year after he moved to Quorndon, stands at the foot of Gallow Hill, on the Harborough-Leicester turnpike. The yard of the old inn was used in recent years as a saddling paddock, when the point-to-point races were held over the Gallow Hill Flats. Great Bowden is now the home of the Fernie hounds. The village is just over a mile north-east of Market Harborough, and is situated on the north bank of the Welland, between the river and the railway and canal. Its houses are grouped round a network of roads leading to Little Bowden and Harborough, Foxton, Thorpe Langton, Welham, and Dingley, on the Peterborough turnpike. The open grass spaces which are a feature of Great Bowden give it a pleasant rural aspect, though it is practically joined on to Harborough. In the centre of the village is the thirteenth-century church of St. Peter, a large stone building, having an embattled western tower with pinnacles, surmounted by a short octagonal spire. The church of St. Mary-in-Arden in Little Bowden parish is less than a mile away.

On the north side of the village is the headquarters of the Fernie Hunt. The large and well-designed stables, which were purchased from Mr. Stokes by the Hunt Committee, are close to Lord Stalbridge's house, and in a paddock opposite them are the new kennels, built in 1924. These stables, apart from being roomy and convenient, are very pleasing in appearance; the buildings surround a square courtyard, of which the main entrance is an archway leading to a lane opposite the kennel paddock. Although the new kennels are not as picturesque as the old Fernie kennels at Medbourne, they are much more convenient and better lighted. As proof of the latter fact, the two pictures of the Fernie hounds which illustrate this book were painted in the gangway that runs the whole length of the building, and there was no difficulty in the matter of light. The headquarters of the Fernie Hunt has the great advantage that it is self-contained, the Master's house, the Hunt servants' cottages, the stables and the kennels being within a few hundred yards of each other. It has the further advantage of being some distance from any frequented highway: north of the village there are only the two quiet by-roads leading to Thorpe Langton and Welham.

When, in 1923, Mrs. Fernie resigned the Mastership, which she had held since Mr. Fernie's death in 1919, the long period of thirty-five seasons during

which the name of Fernie had been linked with the Hunt came to an end. As previously stated, the name was retained as a permanent memorial of the man who had made the Hunt what it is to-day. During the three seasons of Mrs. Fernie's Mastership, including the season when she was Joint-Master with Mrs. Faber, the sport shown had been worthy of the reputation of the Fernie Hounds in the past. A writer in *The Field* of April 26th, 1923, expresses the gratitude felt by all the members of the Hunt to Mr. and Mrs. Fernie. Of the former he says :

" He was one of the few in this world of whom it may truthfully be said ' he has spent his life thinking always of other people and doing all he could for them '—in whatever rank of life they were, fox-hunters, farmers, or labouring men. The kindnesses he has done are innumerable and, apart from his great success as a Master, I do not think that anything I could say, beyond these few words, could pay a higher tribute to his memory."

At a largely attended meeting of the subscribers, covert-owners, and farmers of the Hunt, which was held at the Assembly Rooms, Market Harborough, on March 13th, 1923, Lord Stalbridge was unanimously elected Master.

" One of the best amateur huntsmen in England," as he has often been described, Lord Stalbridge was previously Master of the South and West Wilts, which pack he had hunted himself for many seasons. Great regret was felt when he left his old country to take up the new Mastership. Lord Stalbridge decided to follow his practice with the South and West Wilts, and hunt the Fernie Hounds himself. He has been ably assisted by Fred Grant as 1st whipper-in, and later by Joe Lucas and Reginald Mould, who are the present 1st and 2nd whips, Charles Adcock being kennel-huntsman. After his first year in office, the new Master was supported in the field by Major H. A. Wernher, who was elected Joint-Master in 1924.

Lord Stalbridge has shown excellent sport with the Fernie. In spite of the foot-and-mouth restrictions, which seriously interfered with hunting during his first seasons, there have been some notable runs, in many of which the Prince of Wales, whose first appearance with a Leicestershire pack was with the Fernie in 1920, has taken part. The opening meet at Gumley, in 1923, was on November 9th. A large field, which included many well-known followers of the Hunt, was present to welcome the new Master. The first draw was, as usual, Gumley Covert, and a fox was soon found that ran a ring round Smeeton Gorse and Gumley Wood, being eventually lost. A second fox was found at Bunkers Hill. But the best run of the day was a fine run

of an hour and twenty minutes from Mowsley Covert; the fox ran between this covert and Bosworth Gorse, but finally broke away for South Kilworth, where he went to ground. This run was a good start for Lord Stalbridge's first season. There was a very fast run of an hour and fifteen minutes early in December, from Merivale Little Wood, round by Beaumont Chase and Stoke End, back to Merivale, and on to Holt; then by Great Easton and Watson's Gorse, and past Skevington's Gorse. The fox was rolled over in the open close to Blaston. Later in the month, the Prince of Wales took part in a hard gallop from the Laughton Hills; the line was short, but it led over a stiff country, by Gumley Wood, and there were many empty saddles.

The following season saw some long runs, and many of the fixtures were attended, as before, by very large fields. There is not space here to give details of the runs during the last few years, which are all familiar to those who took part in them. Exception must be made, however, in the case of one which ranks among the historic runs in the Harborough Country. This run took place on January 28th, 1926. The largely attended meet was at Great Glenn, the field including the Prince of Wales and Prince Henry. Moving off to Glenn Oaks, hounds soon got on the line of a fox, but he was headed, and made his way back to covert. From Glenn Gorse a fox provided a ringing hunt by way of Oadby, Great Stretton and Stackley, being eventually lost near Buswell's farm. Harris's Spinney was next drawn, and a quick find sent hounds away to Sunny Leys and Thurnby. A fresh fox picked up in the latter covert then led the hunt of the season. His first point was for Houghton, but he veered left-handed and crossed the Uppingham turnpike, pointing for Scraptoft. Here he turned to the right, his course leading past Botany Bay and the Coplow, as if he were making for Billesdon, but, taking a sharp right-hand turn, he doubled back past Houghton Windmill and sank the vale for Keyham. Just short of this village, he turned for Scraptoft Plantation, crossed the railway, and breasted the hill for Houghton. The pack, which had been running at a great pace almost without a check, continued over Houghton Mere and crossed the Billesdon Brook. Having reached the Norton Brook, hounds worked up to Norton Gorse, which the fox did not enter. The pace, and several falls, had greatly reduced the field, and the big fences round Norton Gorse took further toll. The chase held on to Hall's Spinney and Swadborough, with hounds close to their fox. The few followers left in this great hunt struggled gamely to keep hounds in sight, the fox being viewed a field in front of the pack, near Clarke's Bush. The line led through this covert and almost to Sunny Leys, in the neighbourhood of which the fox was lost. Hounds

failed to pick up the scent, and thus ended a hunt of two and a quarter hours over a big country—a hunt which is worthy of the best in Tailby's day, or the old days of the Quorn. Such a run promises well for the future. The Fernie country is freer from wire than it has been for a long time, and, as earlier chapters describing it in detail have shown, there are now only one or two definite areas where the fences are wired, all of small extent.

The road from Great Bowden to Harborough leads past the railway station, and joins the Peterborough road. This road joins the London turnpike, which runs through the centre of the town.

Past the church, the old grammar school with its arches, and such of the old inns as still remain, the traffic roars on its way from Leicester to London. Harborough is at times a noisy town, when the thunder of heavy lorries shakes the walls of the old houses. Down by the bridge that has supplanted the Great Bridge on the Northampton road, or the bridge that has long replaced the ford on the road to Farndon, the River Welland can be seen flowing slowly towards the sea. Sometimes, just before dusk, there is a hunting scene by the Welland that recalls old days, when, after a raid into the Pytchley country, the Fernie Hunt crosses the river on its way back to kennels, the scarlet coats of the Master and whips reflected in the water, the hounds, tired and mud-splashed, jogging along the slippery road.

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"While his contemporaries are preserved only in the pages of 'Nimrod,' 'The Druid,' and the rest, Osbaldeston has a real existence outside them, has become a legendary figure, a part of our tradition. His autobiography, written in London during the last years of his life, was recently rescued from the rats and mice, after they had made meals of a part of it. It is now given us with a charming introductory essay by the editor of the *Field*, and excellently edited by its discoverer, Mr. E. D. Cuming. Its form one can only call magnificent. It is beautifully printed and bound, and contains 16 illustrations in colour and 75 in black and white . . . the collection is a delightful one, a bodyguard of fine men, horses, and hounds, well worthy to escort the old Squire on his road to posterity."—*The Times*.

"We have all delighted in the autobiography of the Old Squire, as he called himself, while it was appearing week by week in the *Field*, and rejoice to have it reprinted with a singular wealth of the most intriguing illustrations. A fine type of the essential Englishman, content to be great in his special sphere, we are glad he is now honoured with this memorial of a spacious and sumptuous volume which is a credit to everybody concerned in its production."—*The Morning Post*.

"The literature of sport has been greatly enriched by the recent publication of the Autobiography of George Osbaldeston. . . . It has now been produced in a handsome *editio princeps* by the Bodley Head, with an admirable introduction by the editor of the *Field* and embellished by a whole gallery of sporting pictures, many of which have never been reproduced before. The book will be a classic."—*The Daily Telegraph*.

"This book is the Tutankhamen's tomb of sporting archæology. It is an important addition to sporting history and it is a museum of racy stories. . . . The book is beautifully produced, freely illustrated with rare old prints and paintings, learnedly annotated by Mr. Cuming, and furnished with a model introduction."—*The Observer*.

"Few more remarkable books of the kind exist. The name of Osbaldeston had been a household word among hunting, racing, and other sporting people for so many years that when the autobiography was published serially in the *Field*, offers of notes and loans of pictures came in from all parts of the country. The illustrations alone would make this book a fascinating volume."—*The Spectator*.

"Many people must have delighted in George Osbaldeston's memoirs as they have appeared week by week in the *Field*. They have now been published in a book with an introduction conceived in just the right vein of romantic admiration, and a most interesting commentary by Mr. E. D. Cuming. When all is said and done, there is nothing that we envy so much as pluck, and if ever any man had it, it was George Osbaldeston."—*Country Life*.

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